OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

ZYNAPS

DOMINIC ROBERTSON REVISITS HIS HIT SPECTRUM SHOOT-'EM-UP



ALSO INSIDE

FEUD | DRAGON'S LAIR | TRS-80
SANITARIUM | BANJO-KAZOOIE
RESIDENT EVIL 4 | ROGUE LEGACY

ATARI 7800

30 YEARS ON: A CULT CONSOLE CELEBRATED

- THE BEST ARCADE CONVERSIONS
- TOP DEVELOPERS INTERVIEWED
- WHY IT DIDN'T SUCCEED

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IN THIS FANTASTIC ISSUE

SHINOBI

GREAT BOSSES, BEST CONVERSIONS: YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SEGA'S ARCADE SMASH

ODDWORLD INHABITANTS

LORNE LANNING AND OTHERS LOOK BACK AT THE HOUSE THAT ABE BUILT

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

JOHN ROMERO DISCUSSES THE BIRTH OF GAMING'S BIGGEST GENRE

IMAGINE PUBLISHING
Digital Edition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 132

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER



DARRAN JONES

Titanfall. It's fresh, it's exciting and it reminds me of the time I first played *Doom*, except now I can run along walls.

Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Plants Vs Zombies: Garden Warfare

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

I'm not great with first-person shooters as I get terrible motion sickness, but I played a lot of *Quake III: Arena* on my Dreamcast back in the day.

Expertise:
Coin-ops, Sega hardware and everything Nineties

Currently playing:
Another World 20th Anniversary Edition

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



PAUL DRURY

Stranger's Wrath for the literal take on 'live ammunition', the mixing of first-person blasting and third-person bounding and the obvious love poured into creating the game world. Such a pity it was criminally overlooked at the time.

Expertise:
Permadeath

Currently playing:
Rogue Legacy

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



STEVE HOLMES

BioShock and *COD 4* are great, but *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* just has something about it. I think it's all the hexagons, I like how they tessellate.

Expertise:
Blaming lag

Currently playing:
The Last Of Us Remastered

Favourite game of all time:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time



JONATHAN WELLS

Doom is where it all started for me, but I will have to say *Deus Ex*. An excellent shooter with RPG elements.

Expertise:
Tackling dirty nappies and retro spreads

Currently playing:
Guacamelee! Super Turbo Championship Edition

Favourite game of all time:
The Secret Of Monkey Island



DAVID CROOKES

Doom. It was the one that started the ball rolling. Scary as hell too.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation (but is that retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Grim Fandango

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



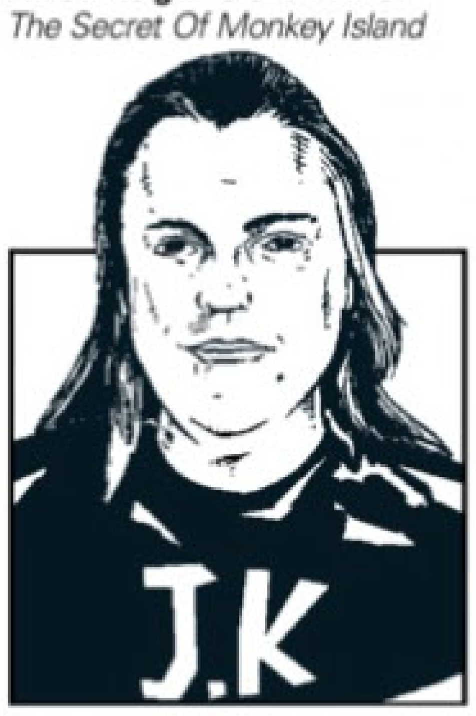
PAUL DAVIES

The original *Unreal Tournament*, we used to laugh so hard!

Expertise:
Finding every last detail

Currently playing:
GTA V

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N' Ghosts



JASON KELK

I'm not a big fan of first person games, but I'll say *Encounter* on the Atari 8-bit.

Expertise:
Indie, homebrew and bedroom-coded games.

Currently playing:
Chronos (ZX Spectrum)

Favourite game of all time:
Io



ANDREW FISHER

Doom, if only for how influential it was on everything that followed it.

Expertise:
Over 30 years of gaming, C64 a speciality

Currently playing:
Deathsmiles (Xbox 360)

Favourite game of all time:
Paradroid

LOADING...



I've come under a lot of flack this month because I've been moaning about the PS4 release of *The Last Of Us* (that's right, I play new games too). Whilst I genuinely believe it's the best game I've ever played, I'm not prepared to pay for the game again after shelling out £60 for the original and its season pass.

I'm a PS4 owner and I want to play *new* games, not ones barely more than a year old, no matter how amazing they may be. We've already had the likes of *Tomb Raider*, and with *Sleeping Dogs*, *Metro* and *Beyond: Two Souls* around the corner, the fad shows no sign of slowing down.

It's been pointed out to me that this happened in the *good old days* as well. Games like *Earthworm Jim* and *Eye Of The Beholder* had shorter times between release than Naughty Dog's classic and even less extras, while even 8-bit games like *Paradroid* had updates with improvements to graphical fidelity and very little else. I guess I'm just a little tired of where the industry is heading and tired of those who will eagerly re-buy Naughty Dog's game, proving to the publishers that 'hey, releasing old games is more beneficial than working on new IP'. In fact, if it wasn't for the release of *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*, I'd be tempted to never play an HD update again…





retro GAMER
GAMING ICON

Is Hideo Kojima gaming's greatest icon?

With the new generation now in full swing we felt it was the perfect time to celebrate some of gaming's biggest icons for an exciting upcoming feature.

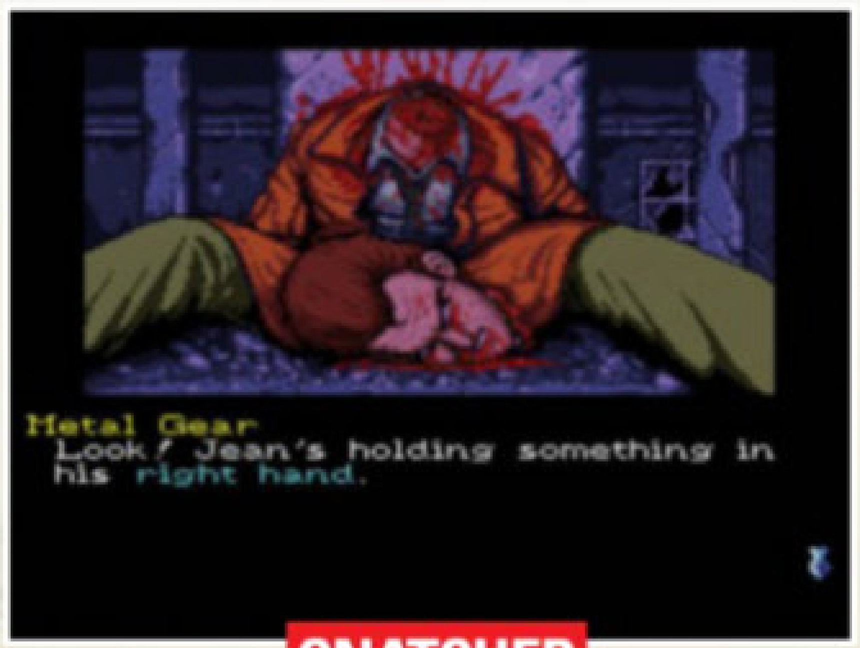
Help **Retro Gamer** find the many important individuals who have turned our favourite pastime into one of the world's biggest forms of entertainment, so that we can give them the recognition they deserve in a future issue. Whether you believe it was Shigeru Miyamoto who refreshed the gaming landscape, or that Nolan Bushnell heralded the start of the industry as we know it, we'd love to have your input. As always the best suggestions will appear in the magazine, so take this chance to join in the celebrations and have your say.

You can tell us about your favourite industry veterans on the **Retro Gamer** forum, our Facebook page, or even via Twitter using **#videogameicons**.

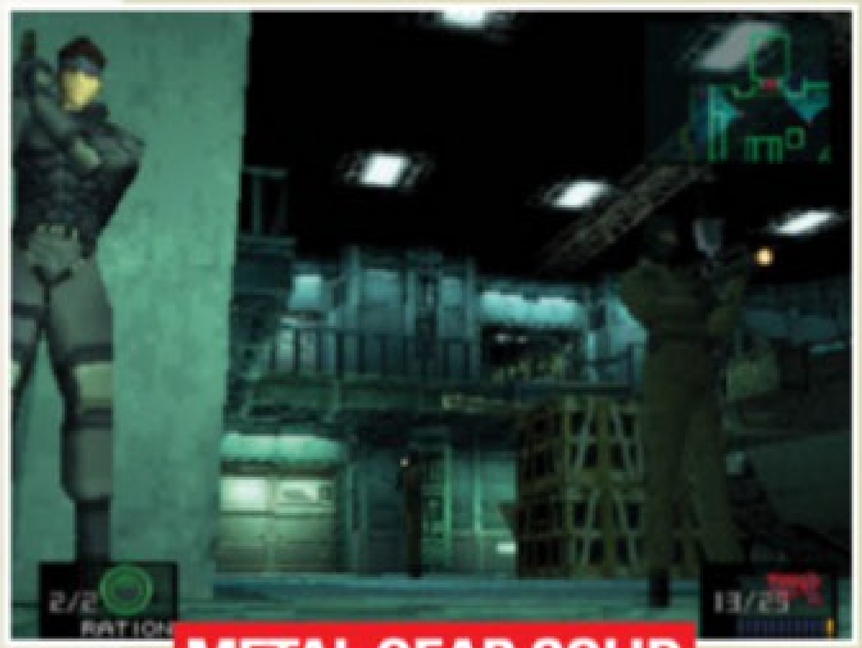
We look forward to your suggestions…

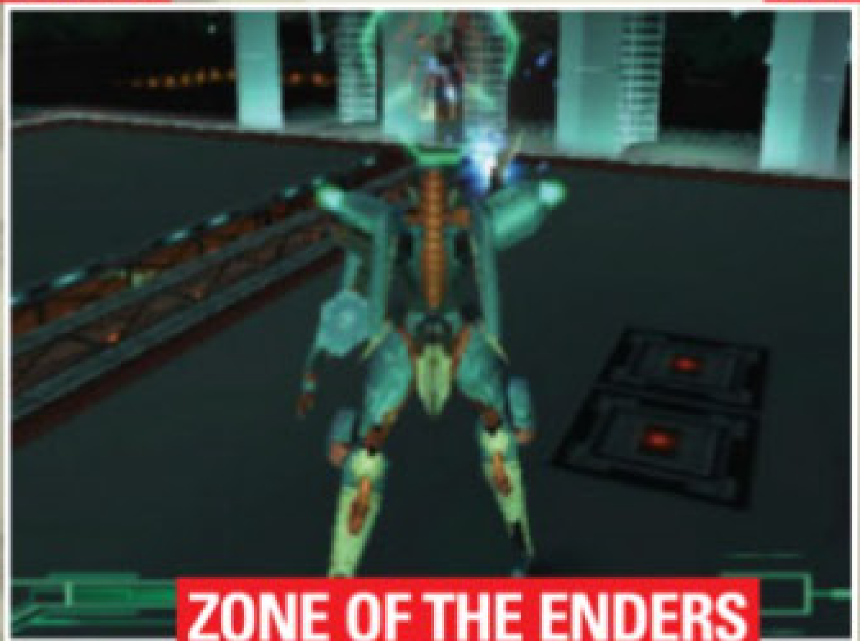


METAL GEAR



SNATCHER


METAL GEAR SOLID


ZONE OF THE ENDERS


BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND



CONTACT US NOW!

What's your favourite **Hideo Kojima** game? Let us know

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@RetroGamer_Mag

retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

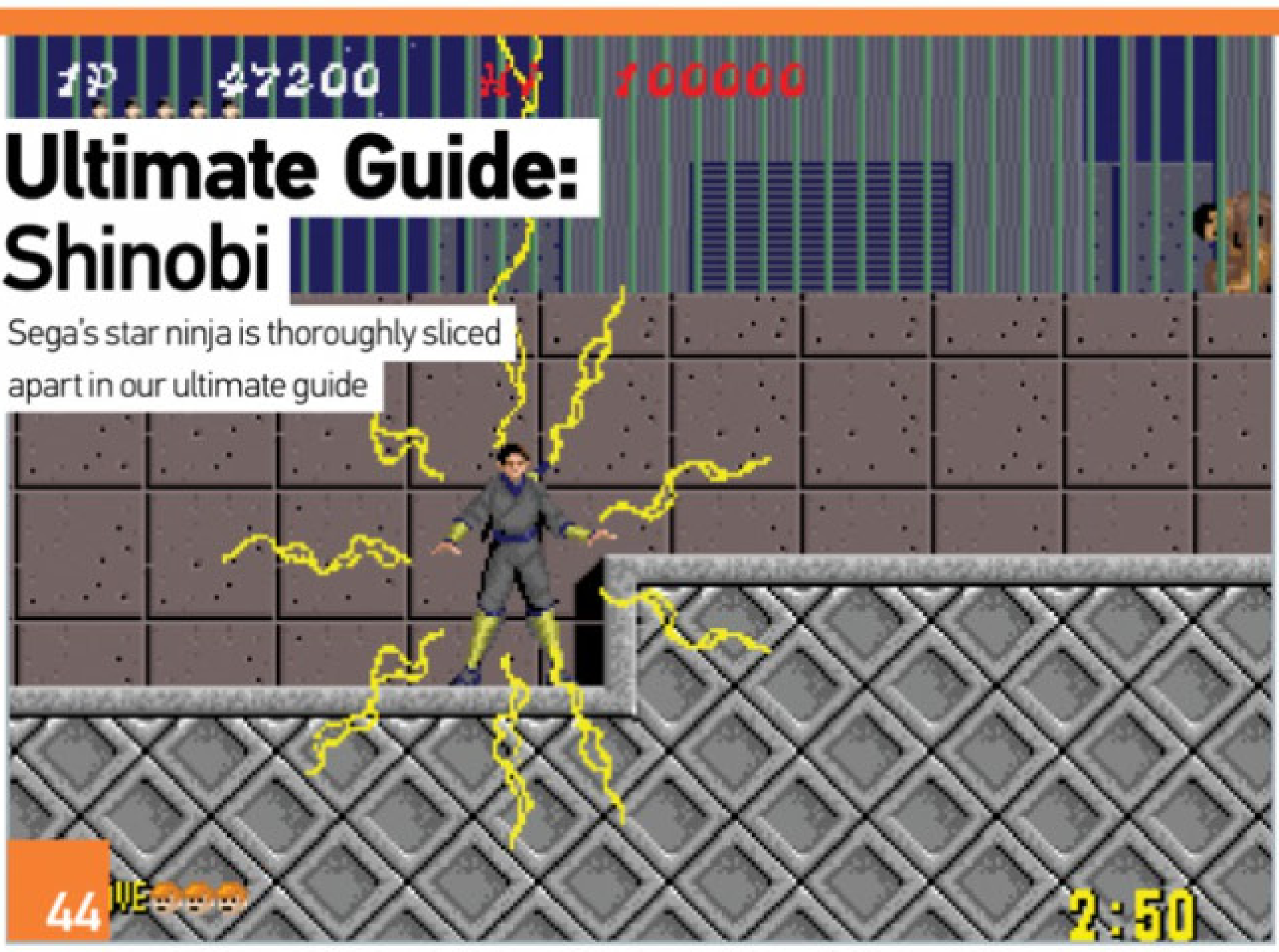
www.retrogamer.net/forum

"There wasn't even a word in Japanese for the job of game designer back then. I would lie at parties. I told people I worked for a financial firm…"

Hideo Kojima

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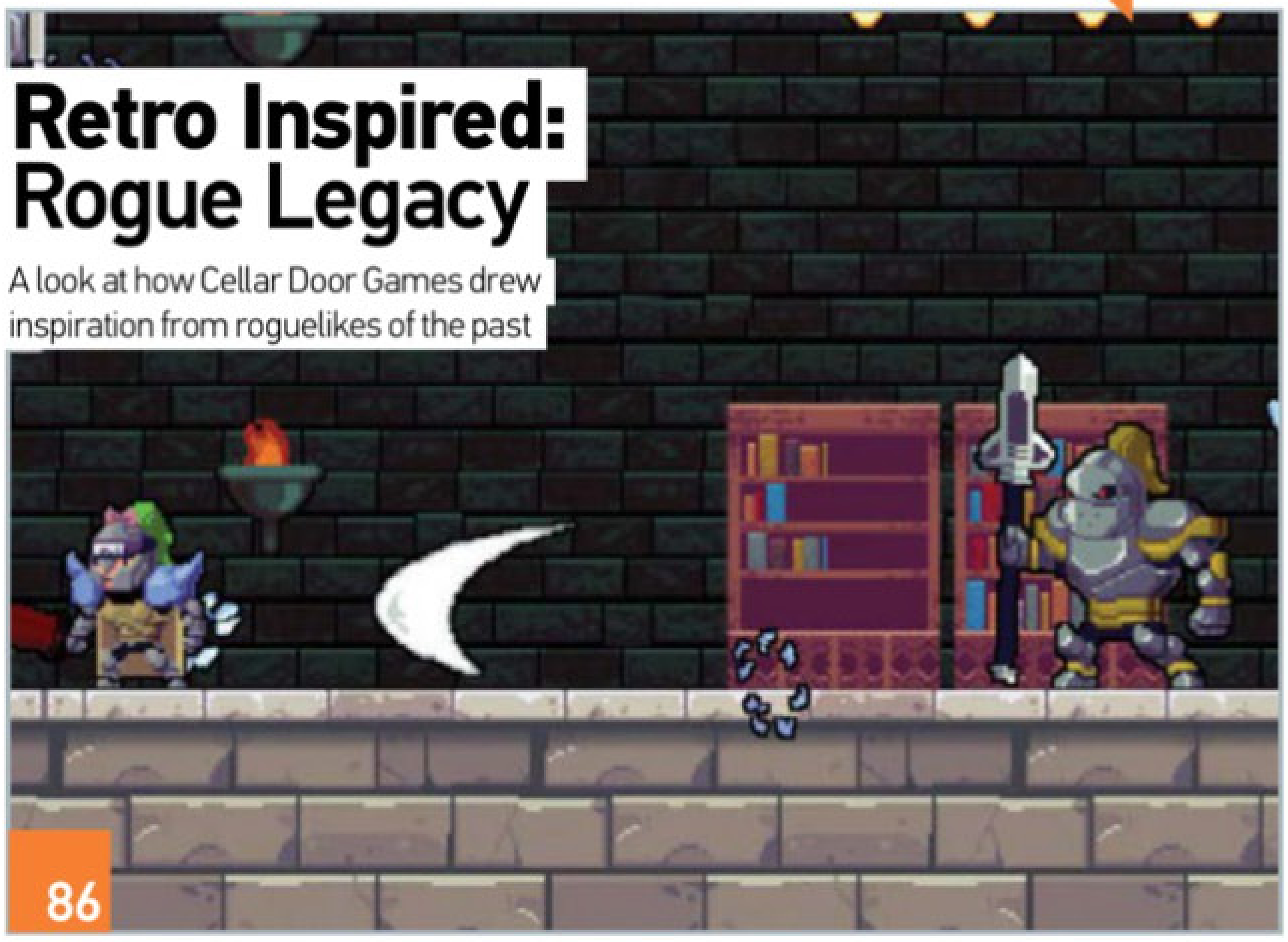
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"Exposed in the open, in broad daylight no less, this doesn't feel like Resident Evil at all – not yet"

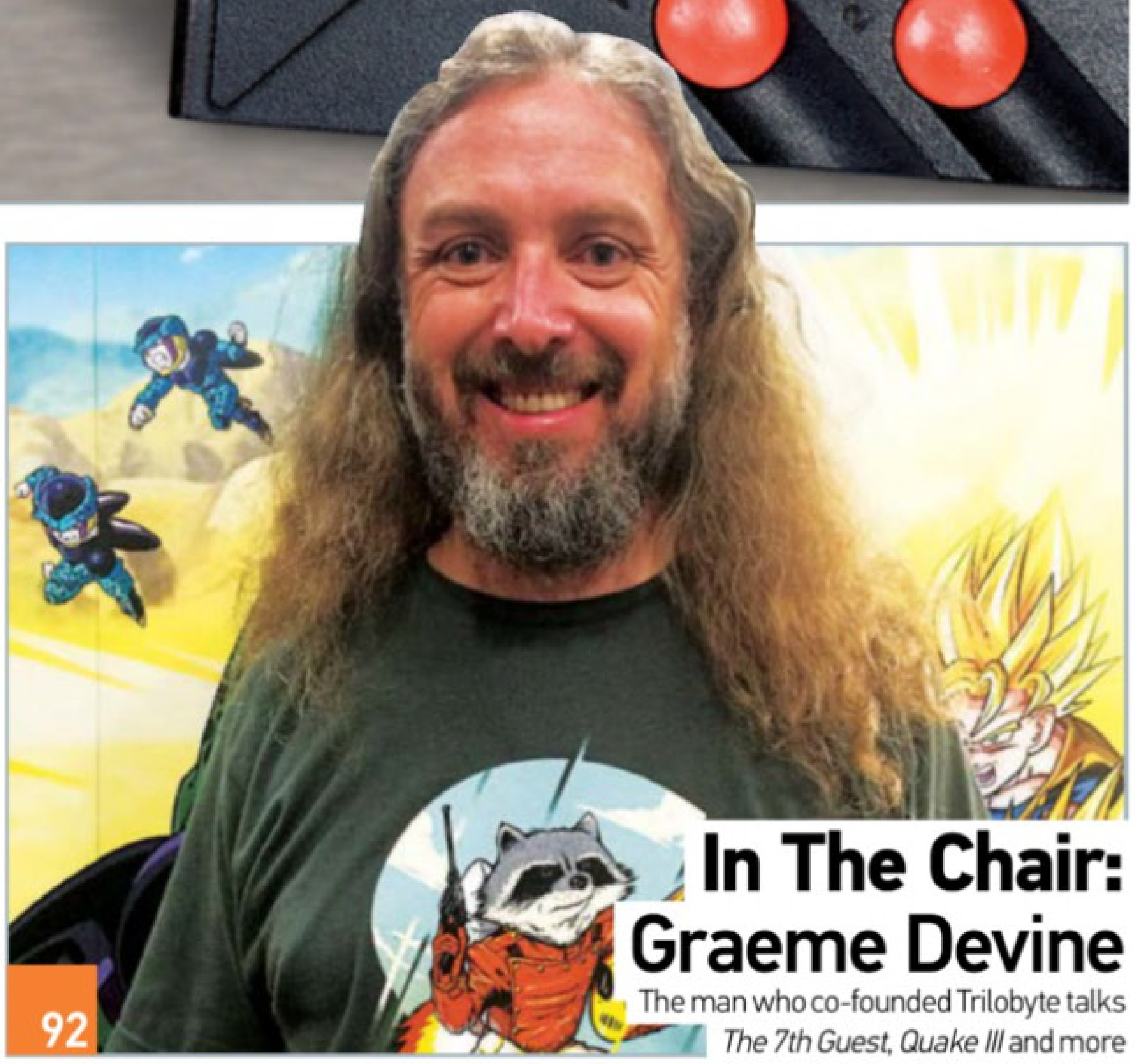
Paul Davies



Retro Inspired: Rogue Legacy

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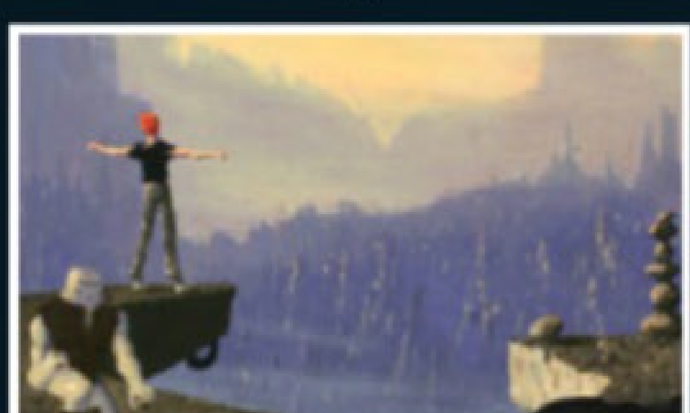
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The man who co-founded Trilobyte talks *The 7th Guest*, *Quake III* and more

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>> It's a relatively quiet month this issue, allowing us to interview Team17's Debbie Bestwick about an interesting new indie project that harks back to the company's early days

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» Team17 has now been publishing and releasing games for nearly 25 years.



TEAM 17 GOES INDIE

HOW THE CLASSIC PUBLISHER IS GOING BACK TO ITS ROOTS

Team17 built a reputation in the early Nineties for having a great talent at spotting classic games like *Alien Breed, Apidya, Assassin,* and of course *Worms.* Now, nearly 25 years after it first formed, the company is performing a similar practise in the current indie scene. Managing director Debbie Bestwick explains further…

Why has Team17 decided to return to publishing games after a fairly short break?
We had been approached a number of times over the past two to three years by fellow studios asking if we would handle publishing – at the time we did not feel it was right. Towards the middle of last year we knew we were in a strong place and it was time to go for it. I spoke with a few friends about my ideas on how we wanted to go about it. I call it 'Disrupting Traditional Publishing' and we call it 'Indie Partner Programme' which is so much more than just publishing.

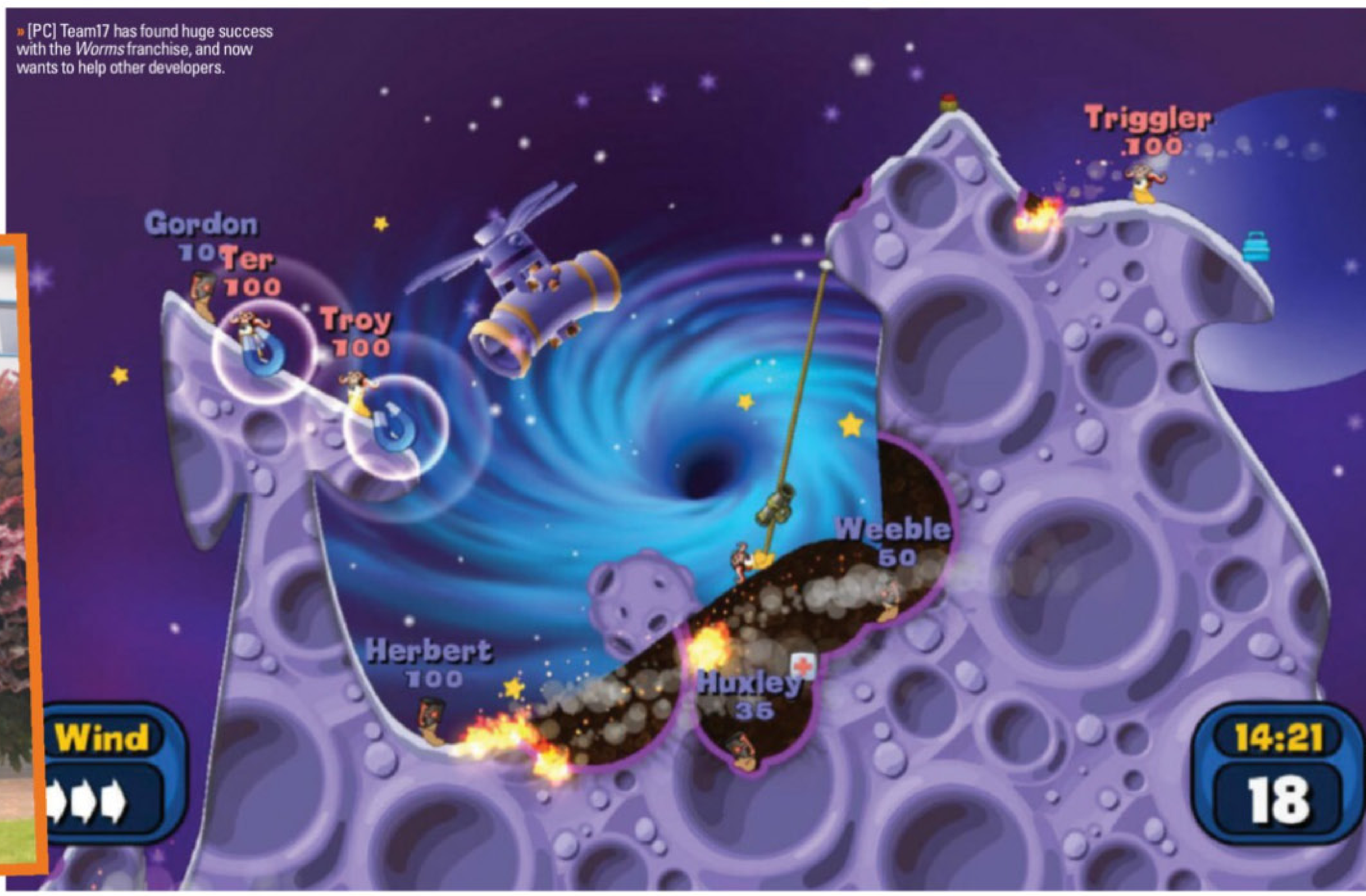
We understand the whole process of making games, launching them, and doing it successfully. I have been sat at their side of the table so many times with lots of top-tier publishers. We do not want to control or own the IPs; we are actually trying to help build new sustainable studios. *Light* by Just A Pixel was recommended to me by Mike Bithell last November and seemed the right kind of game and studio to announce our intentions. Now we are working with eight developers including Team17's internal studio.

You've now come full circle, adopting a similar strategy to Team17's early years. Was this intentional at all?
No, not at all, but our pedigree is and has always been in publishing, so it shouldn't be a shock to too many.

How do you find new games? Do they come to you, or do you search for them?
It has been a mixture. Of the studios we have announced so far, half we directly approached and half approached us. Since announcing the Indie Partner Programme we have literally had several hundred games submitted through our doors, as a result we have got to play and sign some great games. We very actively seek games, most recently *Sheltered* on Kickstarter, which we spotted and immediately went to track the guys

> "There is definitely a retro revival going on right now, that simplistic look is really in!"
> Debbie Bestwick

» [PC] Team17 has found huge success with the *Worms* franchise, and now wants to help other developers.



REMAKE THESE. . .

» The Team17 games we'd love to see updated



ASSASSIN

■ Any game that's effectively a rehash of *Strider* sits well with us. While it wasn't quite as slick as Capcom's coin-op it was arguably better than US Gold's port and still holds up well today. *Assassin* is a great example of Team17 reading the market and seeing what's popular, while coming up with its own take on the game in question. The gameplay feels a little sedate nowadays, but it still looks the part. It would be the perfect fit for Sony's Vita.



ATR: ALL TERRAIN RACING

■ Jamie Woodhouse has already updated *Qwak* for a new generation of gamers, so it would be great to see him perform similar miracles for *ATR*. It's a top-down racer with an array of power-ups, good track design and varied environments to race in. Jamie has already resurrected his Psygnosis hit *Nitro* for iOS and Android, so hopefully the sales were good enough for Team17 to consider an *ATR* remake.



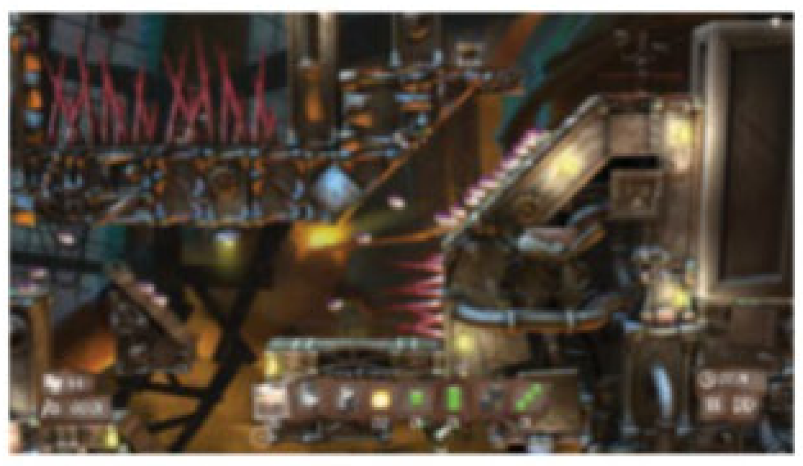
BODY BLOWS GALACTIC

■ We're including *Body Blows Galactic*, not because it was an amazing game, but because we love the idea of intergalactic aliens battling each other for the ultimate prize. There's plenty of indies out there that could tackle Team17's quirky brawler, so hopefully someone will make it happen. If it does get the green light then it simply must have a remixed soundtrack by Allister Brimble, otherwise it's no sale!

down. *Sheltered* is an amazing post-apocalyptic survival strategy game – think of a classic collaboration between *Fallout*, *Papers, Please* and *Gods Will Be Watching*! In fact within just 48 hours of reaching out to the team behind it, Unicube, we had signed them up to our indie programme.

Why do so many of the games that you're publishing have a retro vibe to them? Is it something of a trend in the industry?

There is definitely a retro revival going on right now, that simplistic look is really in! I think *Minecraft* has been a huge influence in this area. We've also seen a lot of classics come back around due to Kickstarter. Plus, the likes of Unity and GameMaker mean that anyone can start to try their hand at game making, you do not particularly need any coding knowledge nowadays though it obviously helps!



» [PC] Imagine a game like *Lemmings* starring the sheep from *Worms* and you'll have a good idea of what to expect from *Flockers*.

***Flockers* seems to be an extension of the *Lemmings* games you made. How have you improved on the basic formula?**

There are some absolutely awesome features in *Flockers*, which are all possible thanks to our own engine and tech that did not exist back then. We have contraptions in there, switches, vehicles that are adorned with lethal death traps that for some reason seem hell-bent on attempting to mow down your poor sheep… There is a lot of love and that classic brand of Team17 humour in the game; we are thrilled with how it has turned out so far!

Were you not tempted to procure programmers to resurrect older IP like *Body Blows* and *Assassin*?

We have a large cupboard full of IP we own from those classic days; so far we played around with *Alien Breed* and *Superfrog*. We are ridiculously busy on all fronts right now but let us see if it makes sense. We are always happy to talk with developers who are interested in remakes.

Considering the large number of games you have announced there are no *Worms* titles. Does this mark a change in direction for Team17 as a company?

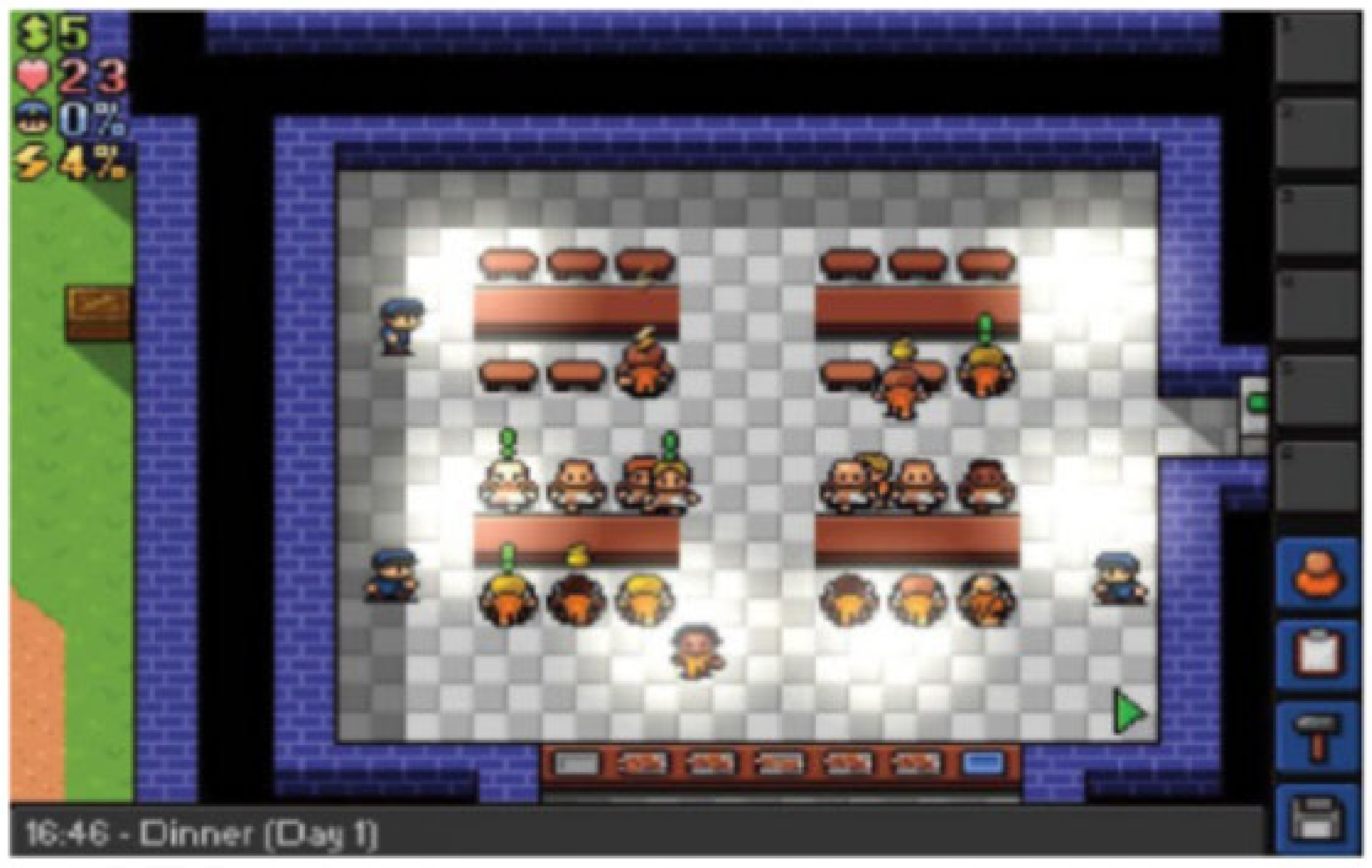
We have said for a while we wanted a break and we are having one in terms of future new games. Currently we are extremely focused on supporting our released *Worms* titles. *Worms* is our foundation – it makes us sustainable and we are incredibly lucky to have such a supportive fan base, we definitely would not be here without them. It is also thanks to the fans and *Worms* that we are now in the fortunate position of being able to lend a helping hand to our fellow indies.

Team17 has been running for 24 years now – what's the secret to its ongoing success?

Retaining your IP. We kept our own IP, and that's something we are intent on not taking from any of our indie partners. We also stayed ahead of trends and moved with the times, we were early adopters of digital distribution and *Worms* has been on mobile for over a decade now. Plus, we really do have the best fans and that is something we are incredibly thankful for after all this time. ★



» [[PC] *The Escapists* draws inspiration from the likes of *The Great Escape* (above) and *School Daze*.



THE VAULT

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH



Kidrobot x Street Fighter Mini Figures

The *Street Fighter* series has always lent itself well to collectable merchandise, as it's built up a large cast of popular characters over the years. These super-deformed mini figures come from Kidrobot, a New York-based manufacturer of limited edition toys, and come randomly packed in 'blind boxes' so you'll have no idea which fighter you're about to get until you open up the packaging.

Price: £8.99
From: www.amazon.co.uk

Karate Sunset T-Shirt

Videogames are brilliant. How many other hobbies offer you the chance to experience the thrill of full-contact martial arts, without the risk of an unpleasant blow to the face? None, that's how many. Of the many games which deliver this experience, we're particularly partial to *International Karate+* – if you're in the same boat, here's a t-shirt which will display that to the world.

Price: £14.99
From: www.8ball.co.uk



Wii 2-in-1 Retro Adapter

If you've built up a big collection of Virtual Console releases on your Wii over the years you might have been tempted by Nintendo's official SNES classic controller, only to find that the eBay price is rather high. This adapter provides a cheaper alternative, plugging into the GameCube controller port and allowing you to use original SNES controllers – and original NES controllers, too.

Price: £7.99
From: www.funstock.co.uk





Super Mario Chess

Mario and friends engage in tactical battles! No, it's not the import-only SNES game *Super Mario RPG*, but a Mario-themed chess set. Given the range of extra-curricular activities the portly plumber seems to enjoy, we're a little surprised that Nintendo hasn't yet put this out as a console game. It's an ideal gift for those who like to mix classic games with classic games.

Price: £44.99
From: www.funstock.co.uk

PICK OF THE MONTH

Bop It! Tetris

Few other games match *Tetris* for sheer addictiveness, and it's pretty clear why that is – the game only ever asks you to perform simple tasks, but the increasing speed gradually makes it impossible to keep up. You know you can keep up next time, and start again as a result. The original *Bop It!* was a reaction test toy with a similar design, asking players to perform simple tasks at speed, so a tie-in with Alexey Pajitnov's timeless puzzle game makes perfect sense, with players sliding, spinning and slamming pieces into place as they appear on screen.

Price: £14.99
From: www.amazon.co.uk



Retro Gamer Coasters

Erase annoying drink rings and get a blast of nostalgia at the same time with our awesome coasters. Available in packs of four, these tough durable coasters feature some of the best **Retro Gamer** covers we've ever produced, making them perfect for your loved ones.

Price: £4.99 **From: www.imagineshop.co.uk**



Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

Corridors of Power

Although I own a medal for being there at the birth of the first-person shooter, I can't say that I was among the earliest to get a grip of, let alone become any good at, what we called 'corridor games'. I was, have been and still am a console gamer. While this mostly allows me to assume that ignorance is bliss, quite a few times I've needed a nudge to spot something significant happening elsewhere. But, for the record, I did buy a decent PC in 1999 to play *Half-Life* and *Quake III*. It had a 3dfx Voodoo card, USB speakers, the whole bit. It died in 2005 after trying to launch *World Of Warcraft*…

Quite a way before all that I was working on *Nintendo Magazine System*, thinking I'd died and gone to heaven but with longer hours than expected and not very good food. I was probably still enjoying *Super Mario All-Stars* and *Super Metroid* when a PR guy from Imagineer showed me this SNES game called *Wolfenstein 3D*… apparently huge on PC, but I didn't believe him. He was a PR guy.

Anyway, I played *Wolfenstein*. I think I even reviewed it for *NMS*. I remember being appalled that you could shoot the dogs and didn't think much of the graphics. With Lenny Kravitz's *Let Love Rule* still on my playlist it took me weeks to cleanse my conscience. As for the tremendous effort required by the SNES to pump out a game based on polygons, this soared way over my split-ends. Yay me.

While all this was going on a guy working downstairs on *PC Review* almost got himself sacked for slagging off *Doom II*. In fact I think he did get sacked because he'd broken an id Software NDA into the bargain. It was a huge scandal all over the fledgling and freely available World Wide Web bulletin boards. One year later I volunteered to review SNES *Doom*, all over it like really bad texture mapping on a Cacodemon. My headlines were lifted from The Stooges' *Raw Power*. My eyes became flames.

Though *Quake* first broke the mould with its freedom to look up and down in addition to left and right, it was *Half-Life* in 1998 that absolutely prevented anyone calling it a corridor game by design. And once the chains had fallen, the likes of *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament* in 1999 really filled their boots within the freshly coined first-person shooter genre.

I'm very embarrassed to have stumbled on the outskirts of the FPS evolution owing to my console blinkers. I'd dabbled with *Eye Of The Beholder* on my mate's Amiga in 1991 but – because Mac just wasn't cool at the time – totally missed *Pathways Into Darkness*, by Bungie no less, in 1993 (because *Star Fox* and *Link's Awakening*, *Samurai Shodown* and *Virtua Fighter*). The leap to gun-toting bad-assery within these realms just didn't register with my noggin until the best examples were doing their sold-out stadium tours.

I have since paid my FPS dues with 'Mile High' in *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* and Legendary solo runs in the *Halo* series. But I always get my arse handed to me during almost any multiplayer session, while turning the air blue, before collapsing exhausted into bed around 3am. GG! *





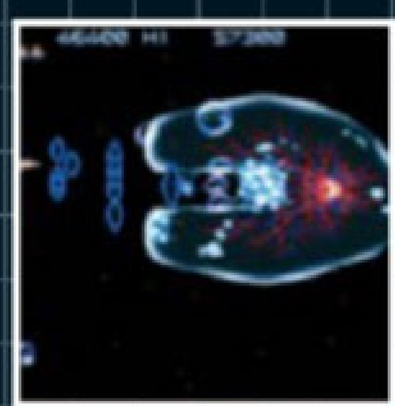
Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

13 August – 11 September

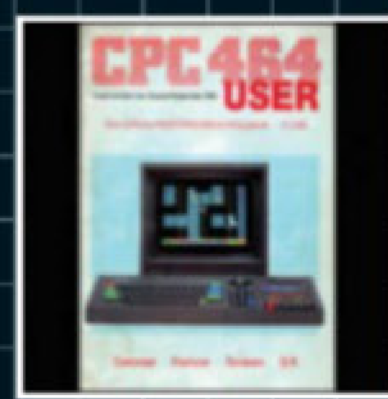
retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present

13-17 August 2014
■ Gamescom, the largest trade fair for videogames in Europe, is to be held in Cologne, Germany.



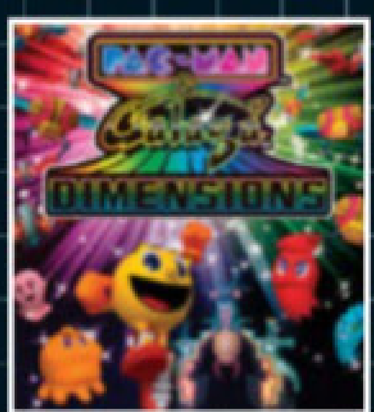
13 August 1991
■ There was side-scrolling shoot-'em-up action with the release of *Gradius III* by Konami on the Super Nintendo.



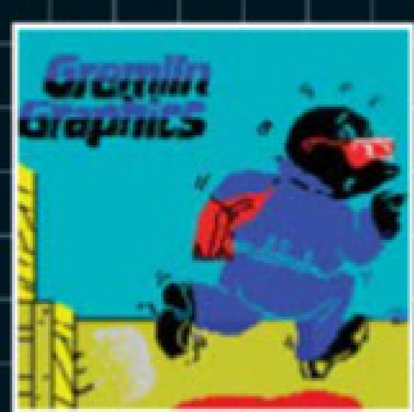
16 August 1984
■ *Amstrad Computer User* magazine makes it debut, although it was originally called the less snappy *464 User*.

16 August 2010
■ The GP2X Caanoo open-source handheld console from Gamepark Holdings goes on sale for the first time.

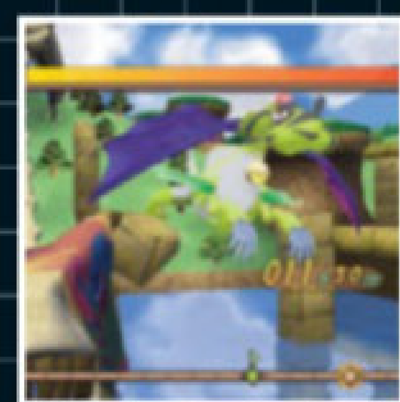




26 August 2011
■ *Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions* is released on the Nintendo 3DS and contains a suite of six games.



26 August 1985
■ Gremlin Graphics releases its classic platform game *Monty On The Run* for the ZX Spectrum.



25 August 2004
■ *Amazing Island* arrives in North America. There was no European version…



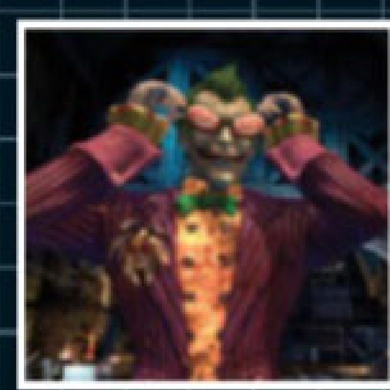
25 August 1983
■ The Acorn Electron is revealed to visitors to the Acorn User Show held at the Cunard Hotel, Hammersmith.



27 August 2014
■ The exotic-sounding RPG game *Hyperdimension Neptunia* is set for its European release on the PlayStation Vita.



28 August 1997
■ *Sonic Jam* arrives on the Sega Saturn in Europe.



28 August 2009
■ Kappow! Thwonk! Splat! Batman is back in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* on the PS3 and Xbox 360.

29 August 1989
■ NEC Corporation's TurboGrafx-16 Entertainment SuperSystem was released in North America.



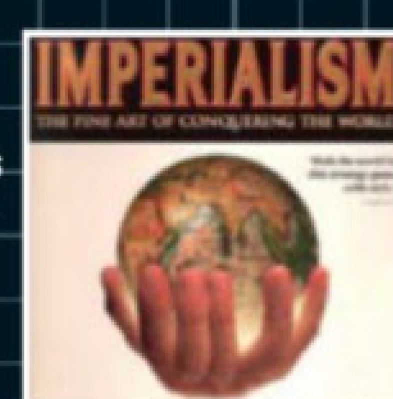
6 September 2002
■ *Turok: Evolution* is released on PlayStation 2 by Acclaim.



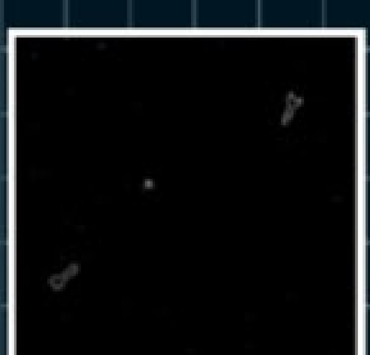
5 September 2014
■ There's more zombie hacking action and adventure in *Dead Rising 3* for the PC when it is released.



2 September 1983
■ Incentive Software is formed. Its first release followed, the scrolling maze game *Splat!*



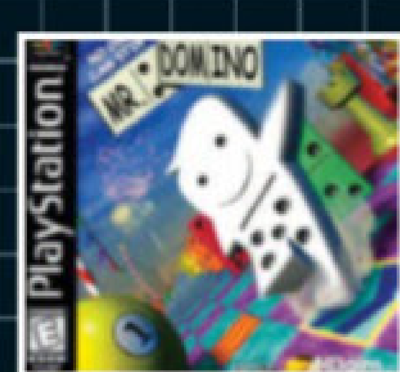
31 August 2001
■ Build an empire in Strategic Simulations Inc's turn-based strategy game *Imperialism*, released on PC and Mac.



10 September 1971
■ *Galaxy Game*, the first commercial videogame and earliest coin-operated videogame, is released at Stanford University, USA.



10 September 1982
■ *Blue Print* is released by Bally Midway, developed by Ashby Computers & Graphics.



11 September 1998
■ The puzzle game *No One Can Stop Mr Domino!* is released on the PlayStation.

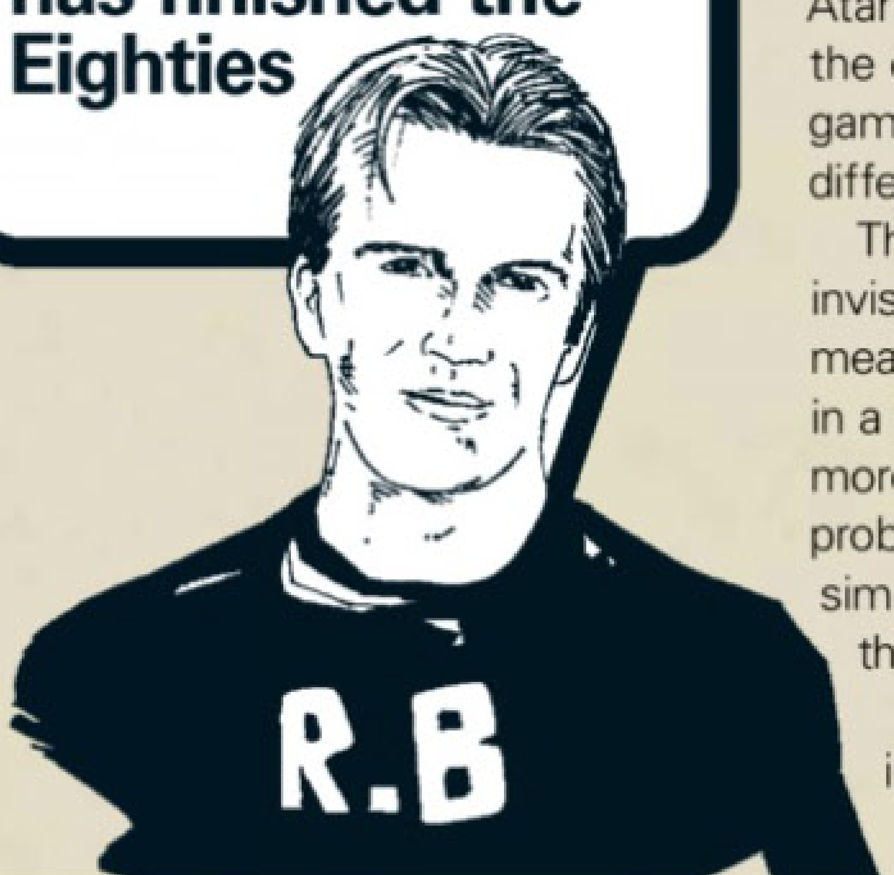


11 September 2014
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1980

JANUARY 1980 – your space is invaded by Atari, Tic-Tac-Toe is Not-That-Good, Car Hunt drives you mad, Cosmic Alien and Megatack arrive with a blast while new magazines appear on the newsstand. Richard Burton has finished the Eighties



The start of a new decade and Atari had two new releases for its 2600 VCS faux wood-grained console; one was hugely playable, the other wasn't.

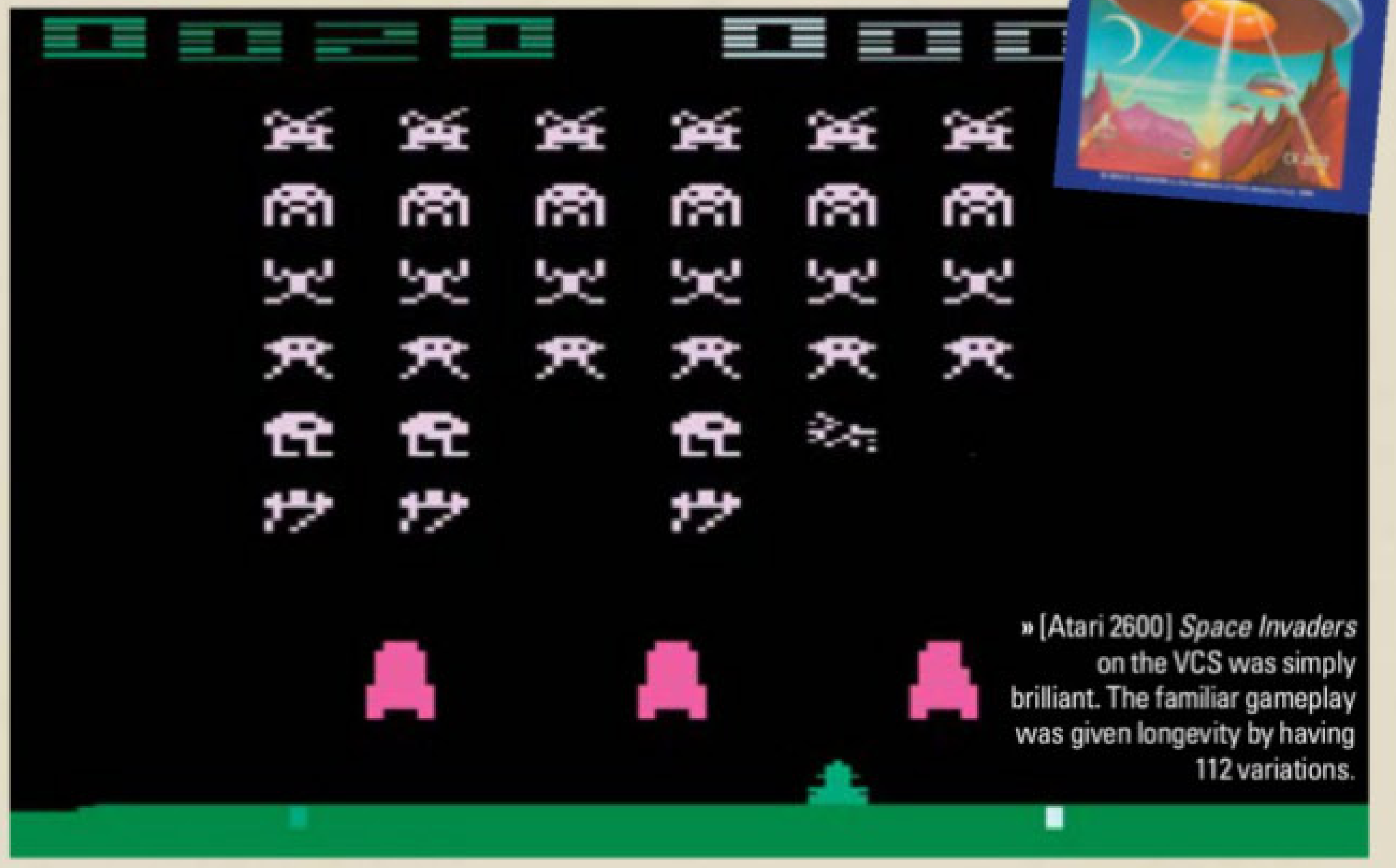
Taito's arcade coin-op game *Space Invaders* was everywhere; it had virtually invaded and infiltrated the planet from arcades to bars. Nowhere was safe from the immensely popular 1978 coin-op game. Now your home wasn't immune from their invasion either.

Atari converted *Space Invaders* to its 2600 and with that it became the first instance of a videogame being licensed for home use. However, rather than just convert the game Atari added multiple variations of the classic game giving the home gamer a mammoth choice with 112 different versions.

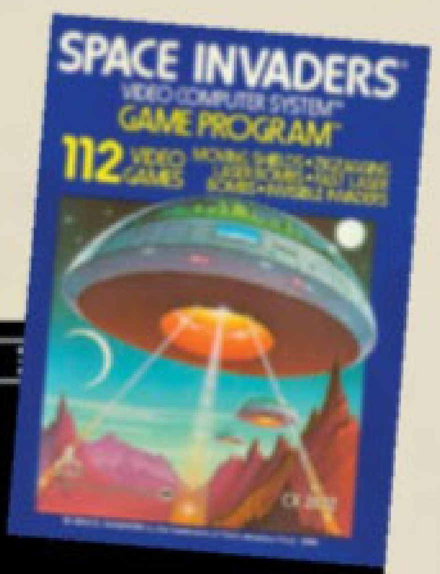
These included versions that had invisible *Space Invaders*, bombs that meandered toward you rather than in a straight line, mobile shields and more two-player options than was probably necessary. You could play simultaneously, cooperatively and the usual competitive play.

Given the graphical differences involved the invading alien hordes were laid out slightly differently to the coin-op with six rows of six different aliens rather than the original layout of five rows of 11 aliens. The 2600 version also only had three defensive bunkers to protect you rather than four.

That said, *Space Invaders* on the 2600 was superb and with so many variations to keep the game fresh, it was hard to find a reason not to buy it if you had a 2600. Such was the popularity of *Space Invaders* generally, once the cartridge was released, sales of Atari's console took off like never before with first-time home gamers snapping up the console and cartridge.



» [Atari 2600] *Space Invaders* on the VCS was simply brilliant. The familiar gameplay was given longevity by having 112 variations.



For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction says Newton's Third Law. This apparently applies to games too as for every magnificent game there is a turd-like release festering not too far behind. The stinker in question this month was Atari's *3-D Tic-Tac-Toe*.

It was noughts and crosses played on a four-by-four grid but with four levels to view simultaneously. The 3D effect was not actually 3D at all

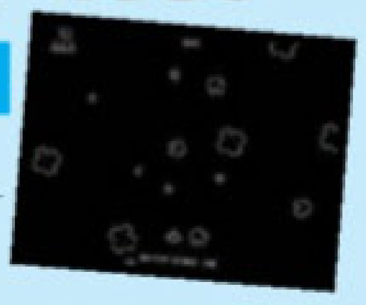


» [Arcade] A swirling mass of blocky black and white graphics didn't make for a pretty *Asteroids* game although it played okay.

CHARTS

JANUARY 1980

ARCADE



1. Asteroids (Atari)
2. Galaxian (Midway)
3. Lunar Lander (Atari)
4. Ozma Wars (SNK)
5. Space Invaders Part II (Midway)

THIS MONTH IN...

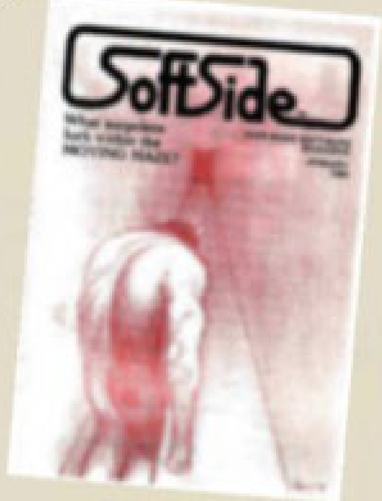
BYTE

With the recent release of the Atari 400 and 800 machines in America, it came as no surprise to see *Byte* magazine feature both the machines and Atari advertising prominently. The Atari 400 would cost $549.99 and the meatier Atari 800 with full-stroke keyboard a truly eye-watering $999.



SOFTSIDE

Softside highlighted problems with the new TRS-80 Model II which seemed to indicate a rather large failure rate. In testing five machines three suffered serious problems, one was dead and one worked fine. *Softside* also noted the repair turnaround time was slow.



COIN CONNECTION

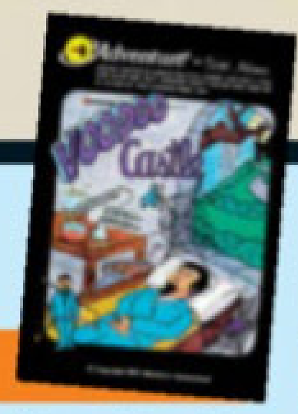
Atari reported its best money earning coin-op machines for 1979 with four Atari titles in the overall top 10. Atari's best were *Atari Football*, *Sprint 2*, *Video Pinball* and *Super Breakout*. Atari's *Asteroids* game appeared in November 1979 but would easily surpass all four of them by the end of 1980.





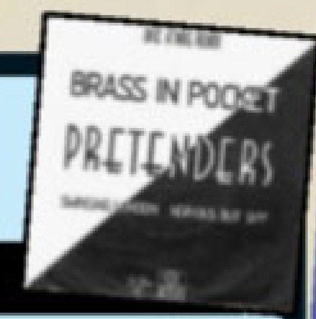
ATARI 2600

1. Canyon Bomber (Atari)
2. Championship Soccer (Atari)
3. Superman (Atari)
4. Sky Diver (Atari)
5. Slot Machines (Atari)



TANDY TRS-80

1. Voodoo Castle (Adventure International)
2. Adventure (MicroSoft)
3. Strange Odyssey (Adventure International)
4. Galactic Trader (Software Exchange)
5. Lost Dutchman's Gold (The Programmer's Guild)



MUSIC

1. Brass In Pocket (Pretenders)
2. With You I'm Born Again (Billy Preston & Syreeta)
3. Another Brick In The Wall (Pink Floyd)
4. My Girl (Madness)
5. Please Don't Go (KC & The Sunshine Band)



» [Atari 2600] *3-D Tic-Tac-Toe* was hard work. Dull, lifeless and oh-so-slow.

but merely four grids heaped on top of each other at an angle… and that was about it.

You placed your O or X on the grid, waited for the response… and waited… and waited… made tea, had a shower, mowed the lawn, came back, made another move and repeated ad nauseam until either the world ended or the Atari 2600 became sentient and wiped out all human life. It wasn't just slow – it was painfully slow.

Granted, it was a relatively simple game presented with the absolute minimum of fuss but it was just so devoid of fun it rendered itself pointless and unnecessary. However, as a test of patience and tolerance it was unsurpassed.

New to arcades this month was Sega's latest coin-op offering *Car Hunt*. It featured a maze full of dots that you had to drive around clearing while keeping the long arm of the law away as you attempted to avoid the police car that was chasing you.

Car Hunt was essentially *Pac-Man* with cars for ghosts. Sadly its playability was as short-lived as its time in the arcades although we can cut *Car Hunt* some slack as it pre-dated *Pac-Man* by five months.

Universal had been releasing arcade games in its *Cosmic* series on a frequent basis. This month saw *Cosmic Alien*, the fourth game in the series in just under a year.

Cosmic Alien was a *Galaxian*-style vertical shoot-'em-up complete with swooping birdlike aliens and plenty of annoying sound effects. While it was colourful and contained reasonable graphics, gameplay was a tad on the slow side. As such it left gamers cold as so-called fast-paced shooters that were neither fast nor that enjoyable to play were sadly commonplace and, unfortunately for *Cosmic Alien*, it fell into both of these categories.

Similarly, another shoot-'em-up which tried hard to be different but only succeeded in being run-of-the-mill was *Megatack* by Centuri. In *Megatack* you had to ward off the

"For every magnificent game there is a turd-like release festering not too far behind"

ever-plodding advance of the aliens who had a steady stream of bombs to drop on you. You had to dodge them and their weaponry until you were hit. You do have a three directional laser that you could employ to keep them at bay. If the aliens reached the ground they bounced around trying to find you and once they did, they ate you.

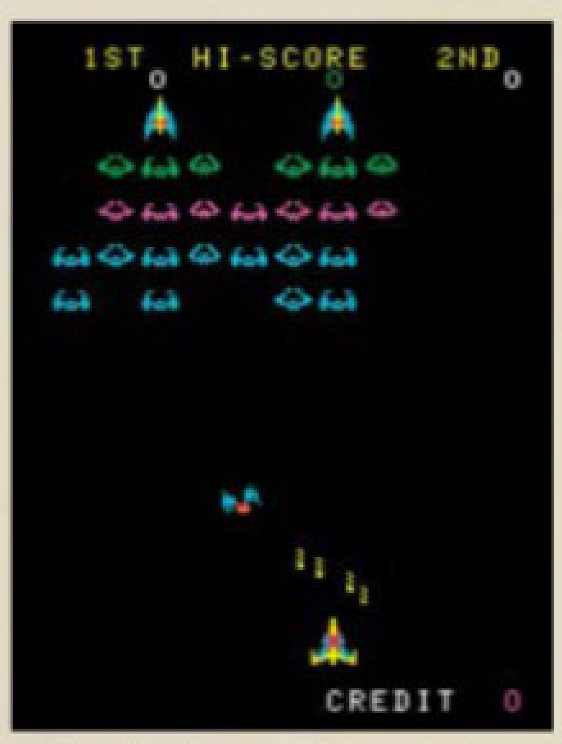
Megatack had two distinct levels although the gameplay was exactly the same with variations of aliens. The first level saw insect-like foes while level two had space rings which grew larger the longer you took to blast them. If they were not shot before reaching a certain size they levitated your ship, engulfed it, shrank and disappeared, ending the level and one of your lives.

While the tri-laser was commendably different and the battle against the space rings a solid idea, it was implemented with too many rough edges to the point where one game was more than enough.

Other notable coin-op releases this month included the *Asteroids* clone by Zilec Games called *Vortex*. It didn't utilise vector graphics instead having chunkier sprites all in a wonderful monochrome hue. The debris floating around to be shot at consisted of stars, planets and alien spaceships. *Vortex* played better than it looked but given its limited release and shelf life, it's not surprising it has remained relatively unknown.

The first issue of the American magazine *80 Microcomputing* hit the newsstands this month. Published and edited by Wayne Green, it focused on Tandy's TRS-80 home computers with a mix of program listings, reviews and articles glued together with a splodge of humour. It went on to become one of the longest running Tandy magazines with an innings of 101 issues.

Second issues of *Compute* and *Computer Age* were also out this month after very successful launches. With new periodicals appearing regularly it looked like home computing was here for the masses rather than just the middle-aged, corduroy-wearing, pipe-smoking hobbyists who tinkered in a shed as some would have us believe… *



» [Arcade] *Cosmic Alien* was your typical *Galaxian* clone yet was already the fourth game in the *Cosmic* series.



» [Arcade] Centuri's *Megatack* was yet another *Galaxian* clone although the aliens did eat you should they reach the bottom of the screen.

JANUARY WORLD NEWS

1 January saw the first episode of the sitcom *Hi-De-Hi!* appear on BBC1. Set in the fictional holiday camp of Maplins, much slapstick and buffoonery followed. It ran for nine series and 58 episodes, spanning eight years.

1 January also saw Gary Larson's *The Far Side* single-panel surreal comic strip debut in the *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper. It ran for 15 years with Larson producing 23 *Far Side* books from the output.

6 January saw another television first with *Family Fortunes* appearing for the first time on ITV. Hosted by Bob Monkhouse the comedy quiz show saw two families battle it out for cash and prizes by answering questions answered by 100 surveyed people.

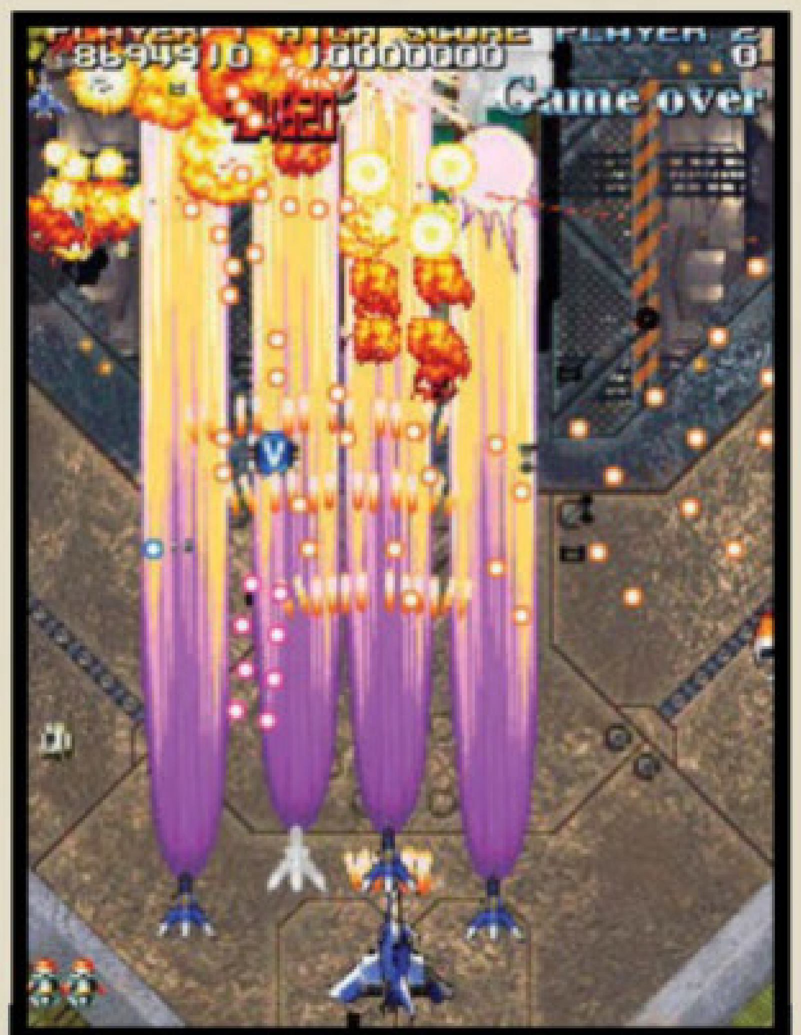
22 January saw Russian human rights activist and nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov arrested for his public protests against the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. He had been pivotal in the design of Sakharov's Third Idea for the Soviet regime, otherwise known as the first Soviet megaton hydrogen bomb.

He later worked on the Tsar Bomb, the biggest detonated bomb ever at 50 megatons (approximately 1,500 times as powerful as the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombs combined). It produced a mushroom cloud 35 miles high and a blast fireball five miles across. Not nice.

Among this month's new album releases were *Pretenders* (The Pretenders), *Malice In Wonderland* (Nazareth), *True Colours* (Split Enz) and *Permanent Waves* (Rush).

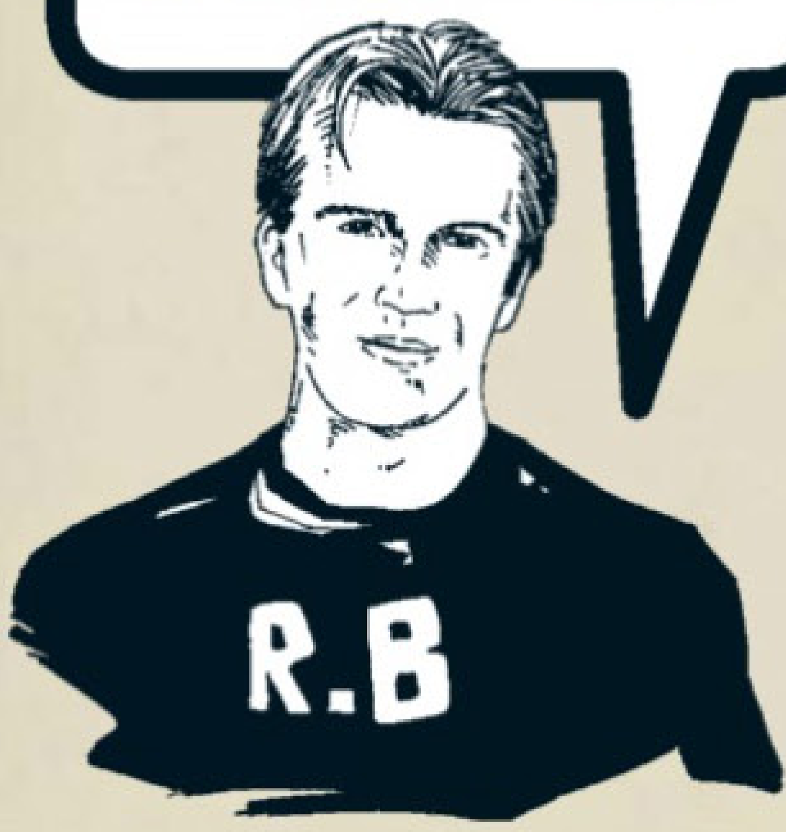
BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1997



» [Arcade] A huge bluster of graphics, sound and colour, but flawed gameplay hampered your enjoyment of it.

JULY 1997 – impending price war consoles hard-up gamers, Grand Theft Auto nears completion, Pocket Monsters sales go bonkers, Ballblazer is back, Bloody Roar hits the arcades while Sengeki Striker misses the mark. Richard Burton saves his money for a Dreamcast…



The console price wars were back with a vengeance this month. It was unclear if these moves to push hardware prices down were due to the competitive nature of the industry and natural price reduction, or perceived poor sales and severe price slashing. What was clear was that the home gamer was the real winner… unless you had bought the consoles a few weeks earlier… then you were the real loser…

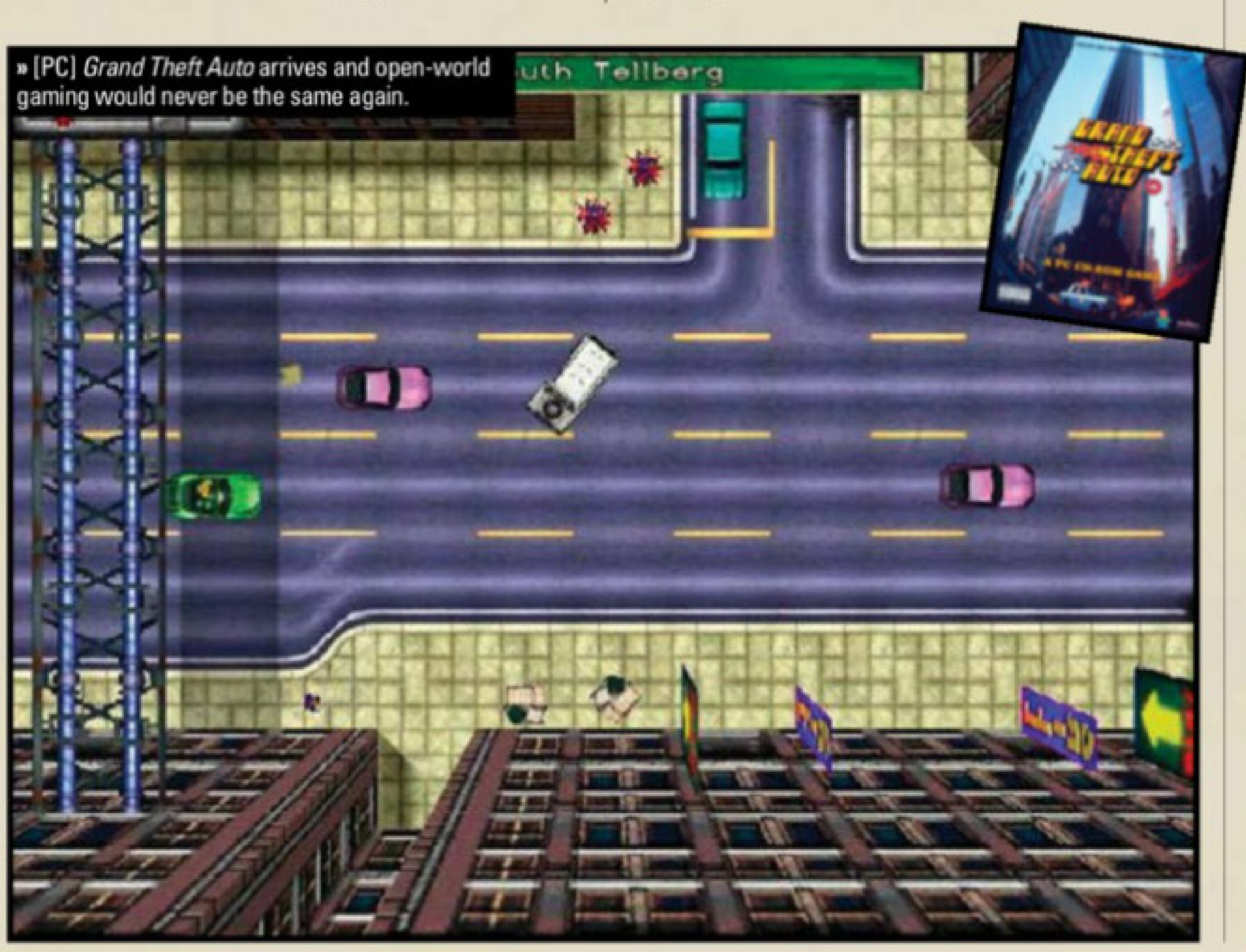
The biggest rumoured price drop was with the Sega Saturn. While Sega was still talking the talk about its Saturn console, it was thought that sales were well down on Sega's projections and the system was struggling to compete against the likes of Sony's PlayStation and Nintendo's new N64. Whatever the reason, the mooted price drop from £199 to £99 would pique the interests of opposing companies, seasoned gamers and impulse buyers alike.

£99 would apparently get you a bog-standard Saturn set-up with controllers, but with no game included, although an alternative package deal priced at £129 would include one game.

Sega's response was seemingly in reply to Nintendo's decision to cut the price of its recently released N64 console from £249 to £149. For two weeks the N64 outstripped the PlayStation for sales, but the gains were short-lived, with Sony slashing the PlayStation from £199 to £129 and regaining the console high ground.

Both Sega and Nintendo appeared to be battling for second place in the console war with the PlayStation outperforming both. Whether the new prices would influence future sales or bring to a halt what appeared to be the slow lingering death of the Sega Saturn only time would tell.

With so many next generation consoles available with a range of top-notch games it was intriguing to find that the best-selling game worldwide was actually a Nintendo Game Boy game. *Pocket Monsters*, later shortened to the more familiar *Pokémon*, had sold over 2.5 million copies since it was released in February. It also made the Game Boy the success it was with a massive upsurge in sales when *Pocket*



» [PC] *Grand Theft Auto* arrives and open-world gaming would never be the same again.



» [PlayStation] *Ballblazer* was back and split opinion. Nothing new or more of the good stuff?

JULY WORLD NEWS

4 July saw NASA's Mars Pathfinder probe land on the surface of Mars. The robotic rover was employed to take meteorological readings as well as photographs of the surface.

However, NASA's primary goal was to see if it could complete a successful low-cost interplanetary mission. It did at a complete cost of $280 million. The original Viking missions to Mars cost just under $1 billion and that was in 1974.

14-15 July saw three new cartoon series debut on the Cartoon Network. *I Am Weasel* followed the sagas of I M Weasel and his running battles with I R Baboon. *Cow And Chicken* followed the surreal world of a cow, called Cow, and her chicken brother, called Chicken. Last but no means least was *Johnny Bravo*, about a smooth talking muscle-bound chap whose mishaps were only outnumbered by his one-liners.

15 July saw fashion designer Gianni Versace shot dead outside of his home in Miami Beach, Florida by Andrew Cunanan. He later committed suicide with the same gun eight days later. It remains a mystery why Cunanan murdered Versace with no motive ever discovered.

27 July saw the debut on American television of the sci-fi series *Stargate SG-1*. Starring Richard Dean Anderson, it was set ten years after the movie and told how the government utilised a series of alien artefacts known as Stargates that could be used to travel between planets.



»[Arcade] Fighting as man or animal, *Bloody Roar* was a well-balanced beat-'em-up with emphasis placed on action rather than finger-twisting controls.

> **"GTA had been in development for three-and-a-half years"**

Monsters was released after sales of the monochrome handheld began to languish slightly.

DMA Design released an update on its free-roaming, open-world, action adventure game *Grand Theft Auto*. This was something of a frequent occurrence given that *GTA* had already been in development for an eventful three-and-a-half years. In that time, there had been several attempts to abort the game, the name had changed from its original title of *Race 'N' Chase* and the proposed Sega Saturn and Nintendo 64 conversions were both permanently shelved.

Thankfully the end looked close for *Grand Theft Auto* with a release date announced for October on PC and December for the PlayStation version.

There was also an update on the development of a classic retro game being rebooted for the PlayStation. *Ballblazer Champions* was being developed by Factor 5, published by its original publisher LucasArts and certainly looked to be squaring up to be a nice remake.

When it did arrive all the same familiar elements of the futuristic sports game were there. You controlled rotofoils on the space rink, which were used to shunt plasma orbs into your opponent's goal. You had power-ups and weapons at your disposal this time around, but it was essentially the same old *Ballblazer* we knew and loved. Some liked it for this very reason, while others loathed it for not being different enough from the original Atari 800 version and assorted 8-bit home computer ports.

There were two interesting coin-op games released this month; one a very playable beat-'em-up and the second a brain-meltingly busy vertical scrolling shoot-'em-up.

First up was *Beastorizer* aka *Bloody Roar: Hyper Beast Duel* developed by Raizing. You could choose from eight different fighters, known as zoanthropes, who had the ability to change into vicious fighting animals. A very naughty company called Tylon Corporation wanted these zoanthropes to turn them into mind-controlled secret weapons. Your task was to battle through the levels until you eventually matched-up with Tylon's own secret zoanthrope weapon, Uriko the Weredemon.

The one-on-one fighting game featured some delightful 3D graphics with an easy to learn control system meaning you could get right into the action rather than learning a 14-button press involving dislocating three different fingers to get a special move. Because of this, the action rarely let up with the pace set to bonkers from the off. *Bloody Roar* was well received and enjoyed success as did the conversion for the PlayStation. Three further *Bloody Roar* games followed.

Sengeki Striker developed by Warashi and published by Kaneko is a game that could've been brilliant but turned out to be odd. Firstly there was no discernable story; it appeared you flew along and shot stuff – whose stuff no one seemed to know – but there was plenty that required dispatching.

The controls were simple, but the firing system was convoluted. Press once for one shot, twice for a burst and pressing continuously activated your Power Shot or power-up options and these just about wiped out everything on the screen which, ordinarily, would be a good thing. Unfortunately, there was so much going on, be it things to shoot or you and your enemies' firepower, it was hard to focus on anything given everything was a blur of sprites and explosions. The frustration levels in *Sengeki Striker* rose steeply due to this as in many cases you didn't even know what killed you.

This could've been a competent, solid, shoot-'em-up. Certainly the graphics and sound were more than adequate enough but regrettably the gameplay was flawed. *

THIS MONTH IN…

COMPUTER & VIDEOGAMES

There was exciting news for N64 owners as Nintendo's *Lylat Wars* aka *Star Fox 64* would soon be ready for release in Europe after *C&VG* showed some amazing preview screenshots. It would also be the first game to be compatible with the console's new Rumble Pak add-on.



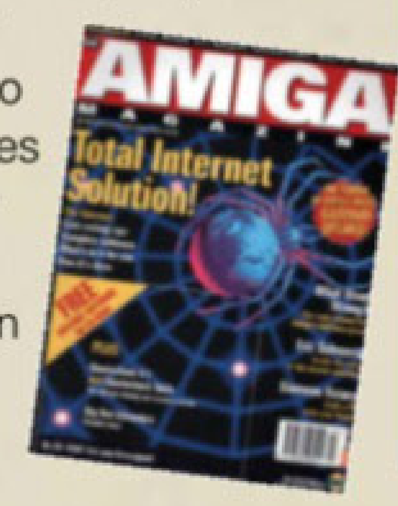
ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

EGM learned from sources inside Sega Japan that development of its new console was underway. Codenamed Dural, the system would be CD-ROM based and would have a 128-bit processor. It would also undergo several name changes during development, settling on Dreamcast.



COMMODORE USER AMIGA

With the news of the Amiga name being sold, *CU Amiga* looked back on how it began. In 1982 a company called Hi-Toro was formed by three dentists looking to invest in the videogames industry. The company was renamed Amiga Inc and eventually taken over by Commodore in 1984.





»[Game Boy] *Pocket Monsters* was selling in huge numbers. When it was renamed and released as *Pokémon* in the US and UK it did rather well too…

CHARTS

JULY 1997

NINTENDO 64



1. Super Mario 64 (Nintendo)
2. Wace Race 64 (Nintendo)
3. Turok: Dinosaur Hunter (Acclaim)
4. Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire (LucasArts/Nintendo)
5. FIFA Soccer 64 (Electronic Arts)

PC



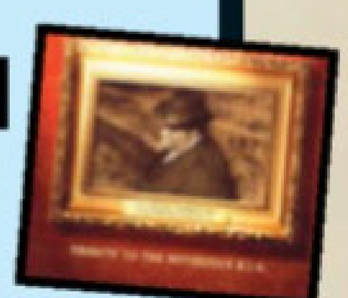
1. Command & Conquer: Red Alert – Counterstrike (Virgin Games)
2. Theme Hospital (Electronic Arts)
3. Command And Conquer: Red Alert (Virgin Games)
4. Championship Manager 2: Double Pack (Eidos)
5. Tomb Raider (Eidos)

PLAYSTATION

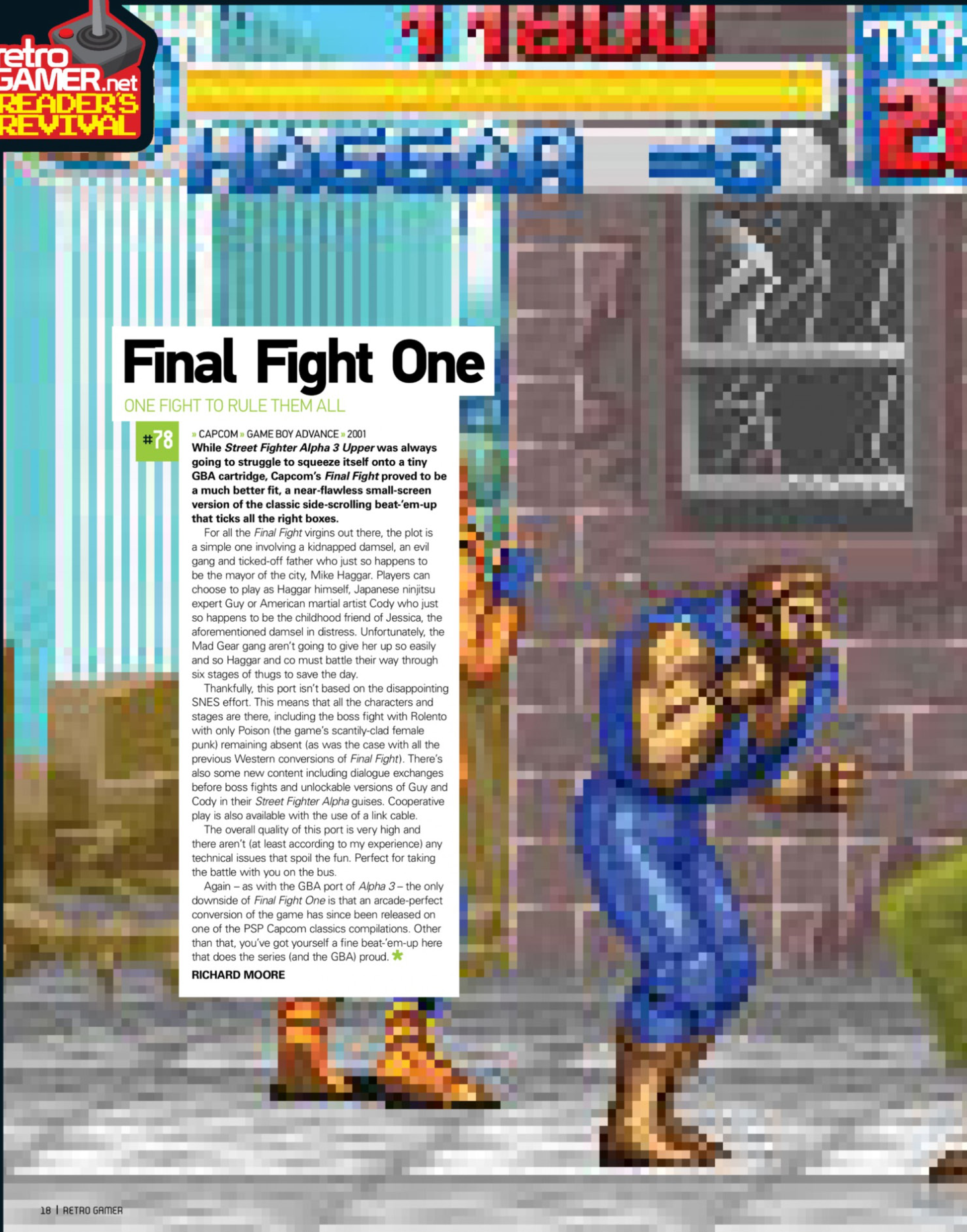


1. Porsche Challenge (Sony)
2. Jonah Lomu Rugby (Codemasters)
3. Micro Machines V3 (Codemasters)
4. Total NBA '97 (Sony)
5. Exhumed (BMG)

MUSIC



1. I'll Be Missing You (Puff Daddy & Faith Evans)
2. D'You Know What I Mean? (Oasis)
3. Ecuador (Sash Ft Rodriguez)
4. Free (Ultra Nate)
5. Freed From Desire (Gala)



Final Fight One

ONE FIGHT TO RULE THEM ALL

#78

» CAPCOM » GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2001

While *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper* was always going to struggle to squeeze itself onto a tiny GBA cartridge, Capcom's *Final Fight* proved to be a much better fit, a near-flawless small-screen version of the classic side-scrolling beat-'em-up that ticks all the right boxes.

For all the *Final Fight* virgins out there, the plot is a simple one involving a kidnapped damsel, an evil gang and ticked-off father who just so happens to be the mayor of the city, Mike Haggar. Players can choose to play as Haggar himself, Japanese ninjitsu expert Guy or American martial artist Cody who just so happens to be the childhood friend of Jessica, the aforementioned damsel in distress. Unfortunately, the Mad Gear gang aren't going to give her up so easily and so Haggar and co must battle their way through six stages of thugs to save the day.

Thankfully, this port isn't based on the disappointing SNES effort. This means that all the characters and stages are there, including the boss fight with Rolento with only Poison (the game's scantily-clad female punk) remaining absent (as was the case with all the previous Western conversions of *Final Fight*). There's also some new content including dialogue exchanges before boss fights and unlockable versions of Guy and Cody in their *Street Fighter Alpha* guises. Cooperative play is also available with the use of a link cable.

The overall quality of this port is very high and there aren't (at least according to my experience) any technical issues that spoil the fun. Perfect for taking the battle with you on the bus.

Again – as with the GBA port of *Alpha 3* – the only downside of *Final Fight One* is that an arcade-perfect conversion of the game has since been released on one of the PSP Capcom classics compilations. Other than that, you've got yourself a fine beat-'em-up here that does the series (and the GBA) proud. *

RICHARD MOORE


BRED
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or you can buy your own coasters for £4.99 from www.imagineshop.co.uk

A MOMENT WITH...

Colin Jones

We speak to the classic Spectrum coder about updating Slightly Magic for a brand new generation of gamers

Why did you decide to revisit *Slightly Magic*?
I took a look at it last year after a gap of over 20 years and I was shocked. In a good way, I should add. It's odd, but I suddenly felt responsible for *Slightly* again. I knew that the thing to do was start a Kickstarter, but for reasons that I'd better not get into here I asked for too much money. I think my campaign was a bit confused, too, if I'm honest. Certainly confused me.



» Here's a selection of the sprites retooled to be used in Colin's update.



» [ZX Spectrum] Here's the original Spectrum version in all its glory.

Turn to page 102 for our review

How were you able to continue after the original Kickstarter didn't hit its target?
I've got enough sense to know that sometimes you have to totally ignore common sense. Because common sense is what everyone else thinks is sensible. People who make stuff tend to have another sense. I guess it's uncommon sense, but you'd never get things done without it. You have to go out on a limb. Otherwise, get a job.

So after the Kickstarter failed, I had no money at all to see the game through. Probably not what people would consider ideal. I decided that the only thing I could do was to carry on alone until something stopped me. Luckily enough nothing did.

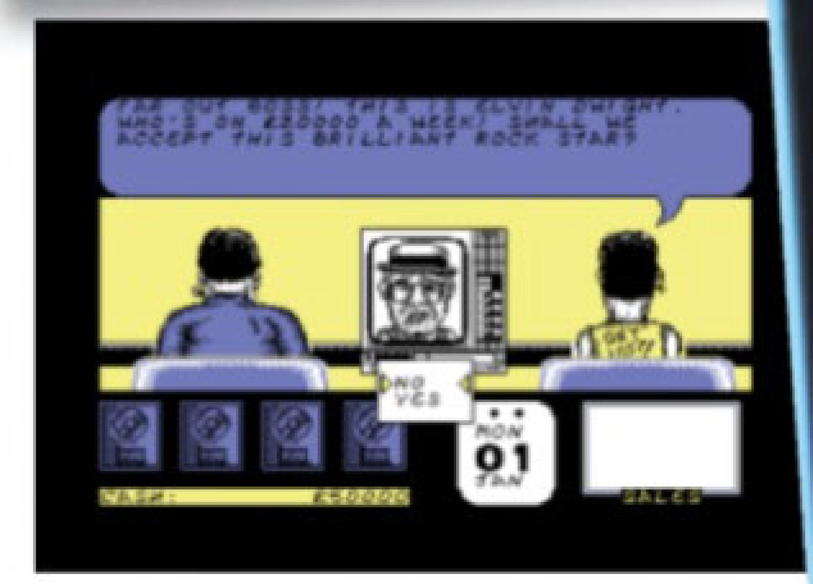
Did you have to secure the rights from Codemasters?
I think what you've got to remember about Codemasters, both then with Richard and David Darling, and now with Rod Cousens, is that these are people who love to foster creativity. The best way to put it is that through decency, foresight, honesty and openness from leading industry figures, both then and now, I got to guide *Slightly Magic* back into this timeslot – which is the best fun I've had for ages.

What improvements have you made over the original Spectrum game?
I had to explain this to people at a developer's conference recently. The best analogy I could come up with was this: what if you woke up one morning with the rights to a classic rock album? What would you do? Would you re-record the album, with new instruments and performers? I wouldn't. You'd remaster it, I'd say. Clean it up using the best technology. But you wouldn't mess about with it, would you? Just make sure that it's out there again, easy to find and available on demand. But treat it with respect; don't screw it up. So essentially, it's the same *Slightly Magic* that people loved, but without the annoying flickering and attribute clash. 60fps too, probably.

Would you consider updating *Rock Star Ate My Hamster* in a similar way?
I've got to say no to that one, unfortunately. I know some people love *Rock Star*, me included, but there are a few reasons I wouldn't. Firstly, legal. I could never deal with a lawsuit from an angry fallen rock god. Financially, or mentally.

And why would I want to? I really wouldn't want to add to today's culture of nit-picking mediocrity. Let's not knock genuinely talented people. Remember them? They came before we had celebrities, before *The X Factor*. I genuinely wouldn't feel comfortable about doing it again. I guess I just feel that there are better, more just targets these days. I'd love to do another game like *Rock Star*, though, so watch this space. *





» [Amstrad] Sorry *Rock Star* fans, but Colin has confirmed that his popular game won't be getting remade.



» [iOS] *Slightly Magic* has been tweaked to look like an enhanced version of the Spectrum original.


NEW
From the makers of
HOW IT WORKS
HOW IT WORKS ILLUSTRATED
New
HISTORY OF THE WORLD
SUPPORTS KEY STAGE 2



"The sprite handling was very impressive for the time. It can handle a ton of on-screen objects without any flicker"
Perry Thuente

ATARI 7800 PROSYSTEM



The Atari 7800 has to be the biggest 'what if' in the history of console gaming. From its turbulent early years to its homebrew renaissance, Kieren Hawken finds out why the ProSystem is still impressing after 30 years

In 1984 the console market in North America was in complete disarray, the US had suffered the infamous videogame crash with companies going out of business left right and centre. Even the industry's biggest player, Atari, had been left battered, bloodied and bruised. It had lost over $500 million and the failure of its newest console, the Atari 5200, had done nothing to help matters. It needed to come up with something fast if it was to turn round its fortunes and for the first time in the company's history this help came from outside, in the form of the General Computer Corporation (GCC).

A few years earlier Atari had taken the fledgling company – started in 1981 by Doug Macrae, John Tylko and Kevin Curran – to court for making illegal mod-kits for a number of its arcade games. This lawsuit actually resulted in GCC working for Atari – it had clearly seen GCC's talent and soon had it developing arcade games such as *Food Fight* and *Quantum*, as well as converting a number of other coin-ops to both the 2600 and 5200 consoles. Atari was really impressed with GCC's ability to not only turn out games quicker than everyone else but also deliver high-quality titles too. In fact Warner had nicknamed GCC "The Toaster" because of the way it was able to just pop games out.

Warner had been looking at ways to revive Atari's fortunes and GCC looked like it might be able to provide the answer. Many projects had been looked at and considered, including the console that would become the Nintendo Entertainment System, but more on that later. Warner had also been conducting surveys to find out exactly what gamers wanted from a console. One of the key messages it got from the public was that they wanted to be able to play their old games on their new system. So GCC proposed a new ▶



» Despite a lengthy delay Atari's console still managed sales of over 3 million. An impressive achievement considering.

▶ console to Warner that would not only provide powerful hardware capable of playing the latest games, it would also play all your old 2600 games. Atari even planned to make adapters to make your 5200 compatible with this new console too, so as not to abandon the users of its current machine. It seemed like the perfect plan.

Initially codenamed the 3600, the ProSystem would quickly become the sole focus of Atari. This upset a few people at Atari who were a bit miffed at Warner going outside of the company to find a new hardware solution. Art Ng, Steve Golson and several of GCC's chip architect designers, with assistance from VLSI, would architect and design a revolutionary new graphics chip called MARIA. This name was chosen because the key custom chip in the 2600 was called TIA, thus completing the name of the popular liqueur Tia Maria. The MARIA would be the heart of the Atari 7800 ProSystem and the very first version of this chip was numbered GCC-1701 because GCC's engineers were big fans of *Star Trek*, the Starship Enterprise being NCC-1701. The only real flaw of the design was that that it didn't include a new sound chip, relying on the old 2600 TIA chip to produce two-channel sound. It was intended that POKEY chips, or a new low-cost sound chip called GUMBY, could be added to cartridges as an alternative option.

The finished console, now known as the Atari 7800 ProSystem, was announced in May 1984 with machines shipping to stores for a test market release the month after. This would see it compete head to head with the similar test market for the Nintendo Entertainment System, the console Atari had turned down in favour of the 7800. A move that would prove extremely costly for the company…

13 games were announced for the system's launch, many of which were conversions of popular arcade games of the time. The press reaction to the 7800 was very positive too, seeing it as a much better bet than the NES. The console was praised for its backwards compatibility, high-quality graphics, sleek design, a return to standard controllers (after the much-maligned 5200 analogue sticks) and for the inclusion of a BIOS that required a digital signature to be included in each game. This was specifically included to stop one of the key contributors to the North American videogame crash – unlicensed third-party software. Atari had big plans for the 7800, as well as announcing a stream of games it also planned to release a high score cartridge for saving your performance, a keyboard to turn it into a fully-fledged computer and even a Laser Disc player that could be hooked up to the expansion port.

Unfortunately for both the 7800 and the gaming public Atari's situation had worsened and Warner decided it wanted shot of the company. Atari was up for sale to the highest bidder and this would bring with it some very complicated issues for the new console. Eventually the consumer division of Atari was purchased by the Tramiels and the new Atari Corporation, as it was known, wanted to re-launch the 7800 across the whole of the US and

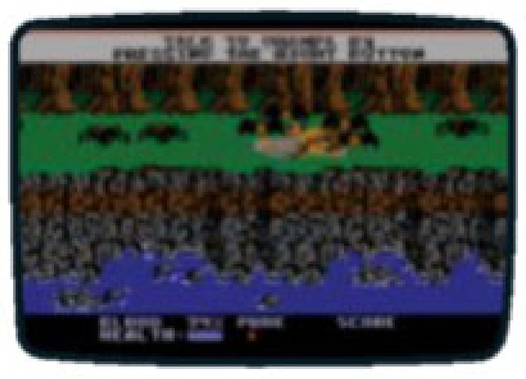
> **"The way it was explained to me was that sports games were popular, ninjas were popular, so Ninja Golf. One can not help but be in awe of the thought process!"**
> David Dentt

TOP 5 EXCLUSIVES Classic games you can't get anywhere else



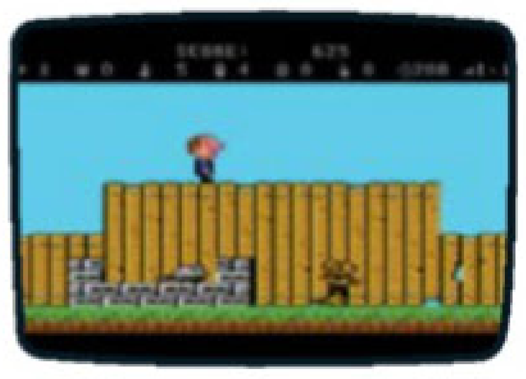
NINJA GOLF
■ ATARI ■ 1989

The 7800's killer app, *Ninja Golf* is possibly the most mental idea for a game ever – a scrolling beat-'em-up where you also have to play golf! Believe it or not the concept works really well and the graphics and sound are particularly impressive, especially the *Shinobi*-esque boss fights as you reach the green. If you need to find a reason to own an Atari 7800 then *Ninja Golf* is most certainly it.



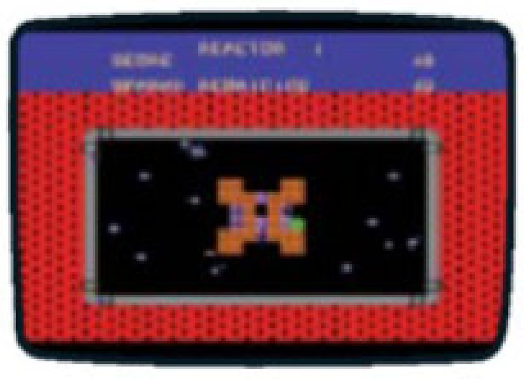
MIDNIGHT MUTANTS
■ ATARI ■ 1990

Starring Grandpa from the cult TV show *The Munsters*, *Midnight Mutants* was one of the last games released for the 7800 and really shows that machine can more than hold its own with the NES and Master System. This isometric arcade adventure has a spooky Hallowe'en-based plot, which is told by an impressive animated intro, and a huge map that will have you playing right into the midnight hours.



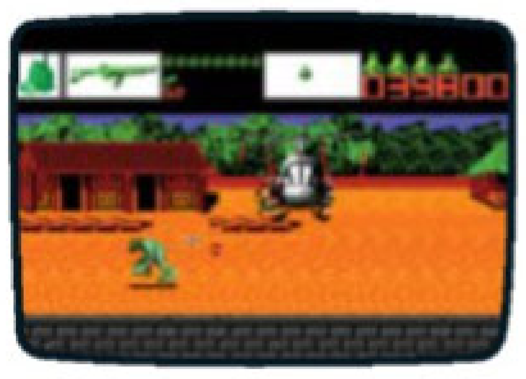
SCRAPYARD DOG
■ ATARI ■ 1990

We are cheating a bit here as this game also appeared on the Atari Lynx, but there enough differences between the games to make this inclusion warranted. *Scrapyard Dog* is clearly inspired by *Super Mario Bros*, a fact that becomes obvious as soon as you start playing it. It's an extremely solid platformer, perhaps the best on the machine, but it lacks the honed controls and the well-crafted level design of the game it's trying to emulate.



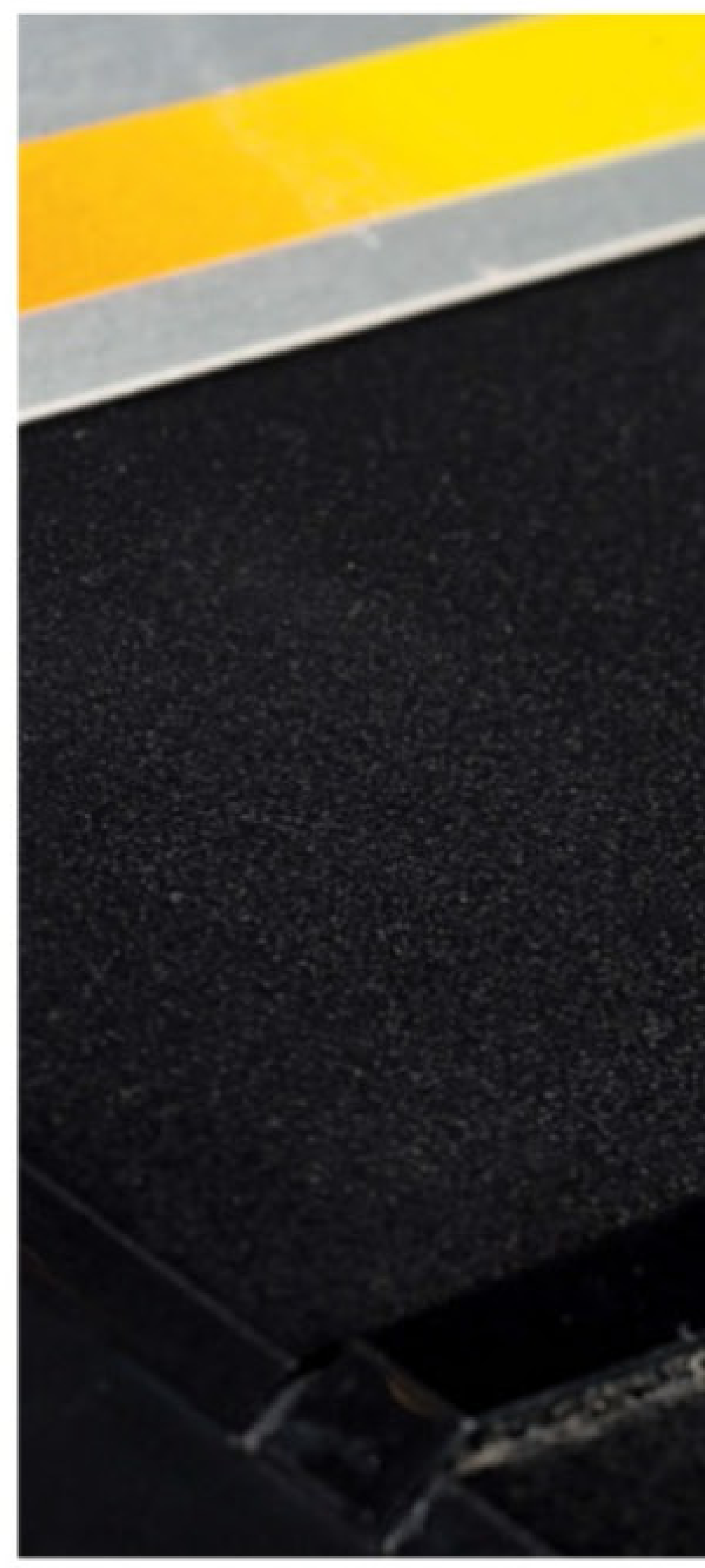
MELTDOWN
■ ATARI ■ 1990

The 7800 lightgun might be hard to track down these days but it's well worth buying as some of the system's best games take advantage of it, including this underrated beauty. *Meltdown* might not look like much but the frantic shooting action will leave you sweating. The password feature is also an excellent edition, meaning you can return to where you left off. Don't underestimate this excellent title.



ALIEN BRIGADE
■ ATARI ■ 1990

Another superb lightgun game for the 7800, *Alien Brigade* is basically *Operation Wolf* crossed with aliens. In fact one look at the screenshots will show more than a passing resemblance to the Taito gun game and the gameplay is just as similar. It's your mission to grab your XG-1 light gun and try to stop the alien invasion. *Alien Brigade* also features some rather swanky visuals too, making it well worth seeking out.



7800 VS NES VS SMS

How Atari's console and its competitors compared



PROCESSOR	ATARI SALLY 6502C @1.79 MHZ	RICOH 2A03 (6502 CORE) @1.79 MHZ	ZILOG Z80 @4MHZ
MEMORY	4K RAM, 4K ROM	2K RAM, 2K VRAM	8K
COLOURS	25	25	52
PALETTE	256	52	256
SPRITES	30+ PER LINE	8 PER LINE	16
RESOLUTION	320×240	256X224	259X192
SOUND	2 CHANNEL MONO	5 CHANNEL MONO	3 CHANNEL MONO



» Sadly the Atari 7800 doesn't have RGB support straight out of the box, which is something of a pity.



» Like the Master System, the Atari 7800 had a pause button, making lengthy sessions far easier to manage.

go head to head with the NES and upcoming Sega Master System. The big problem was that GCC still hadn't been paid, and this caused a lengthy argument between Warner and the Tramiels over who should actually pay. Eventually Jack Tramiel handed over the cash to purchase the rights for the ProSystem from GCC, but then even more negotiations ensued to provide the software he desperately needed. Over a year after the initial purchase, Atari Corp had finally settled all matters regarding the 7800 and was ready to go into production with a full re-launch. Unfortunately for Atari the market for this new console wasn't what it was back in 1984. Not only had Nintendo swept in and aggressively taken hold of Atari's own marketplace, another new player from Japan was also set to enter the market, Sega with its Master System. The console market had been well and truly revived and Atari had a lot of ground to make up if its console was going to be the success story everybody had predicted at its original launch.

Due to Atari Corp's limited finances the 7800 was re-launched with limited advertising, a trickle of games, many of which now looked extremely dated, and very little investment into creating new ones. Atari also cancelled all the planned peripherals and removed the expansion port in order to save money. This wasn't helped by Nintendo's new stranglehold on the market that had seen it block retailers from selling rival consoles, stop publishers making games for anything but the NES and spending big to tie up all the hottest licences. Despite Atari's lack of promotion and unwillingness to spend money supporting the 7800 it performed well in the marketplace, admittedly it was crushed by the NES juggernaut but did relatively well in a very distant second place. While the North American sales figure of 3.77 million (plus what was sold in the original test launch) pales in comparison to the 34 million Nintendo consoles it stands up well against the Master System, which sold less than 2 million in the US. So why wasn't it more successful? David Dentt, creator of *Ninja Golf*, offered the following insight. "There was a second-hand sense I got at the time that people believed it was doomed from the start. In the end, even if everything had been done perfectly, the 7800 never really had a chance because of *Mario*. Especially with the synergy between home and arcade. During my time on *Ninja Golf*, I was still working part-time in an arcade. People would learn things playing *Mario* at home, and then come play the arcade version to show off. A good deal for Nintendo. ▶



» A computer module was planned for the 7800 that included a professional keyboard.



» The controller of the Atari 7800 looks very similar to the one found on the Nintendo Entertainment System.

▶ Just what the 7800 needed, but you can't just come up with a killer game at will."

Initially there were no plans to release the 7800 in Europe, Atari decided to go with the XE Games System instead because this part of the world was dominated by home micros. That all changed when the popular UK magazine *Computer & Video Games* posted a public begging letter to Atari asking for the machine to be released in Europe. Penned by Tony Takoushi in his Hot Gossip section it saw the writer wax lyrical about the 7800 after having picked one up from the US. He bemoaned Atari's decision to go with the XE range and drooled over the 7800's graphical capabilities and ability to mimic popular arcade games. He also compared it to the rival NES and Master System, where he complained about the prices of the Sega and Nintendo products. Atari listened and a change of heart saw the PAL 7800 make its debut in 1987 with a new faceplate and simplified name. The 7800 went on to sell well in the UK and Europe and in a 1990 issue of *Raze* magazine it was reported that Atari currently had a 50 per cent share of the console market in the UK, taken from an independent Mintel report this was not to be sniffed at. We asked Atari UK marketing manager Darryl Still about the machine's performance, keen to know if it was as poorly placed in the market as many thought. "It was very well stocked by European retail," he reveals. "Although it never got the consumer traction that the 2600 did, I remember we used to sell a lot of units through mail order catalogues and in the less affluent areas."

So the question has to be asked about what the 7800 was like for the people who worked on it? Despite Atari not crediting people for their work on 7800 games, we managed to track down some people with first-hand experience of the console. David Dentt is particularly notable as he was the programmer and designer of the console's 'killer app' – the seemingly ridiculous but ultimately brilliant *Ninja Golf*. The first question we had to ask him was just how he came up with the original concept.

"The idea actually came from someone at Atari," he explains. "The way it was explained to me was that sports games were popular, ninjas were popular, so *Ninja Golf*. One can not help but be in awe of the thought process!" Wanting to know more we asked



» [Atari 7800] Curt Vendel released and manufactured reproductions of the planned 7800 High Score Cartridge.

AN INTERVIEW WITH CURT VENDEL

The curator of the Atari Museum discusses the 7800 XM



What prompted you to start developing the 7800 XM?

I have many original drawings and mechanical drawings from Atari, and one was for the original piggyback CPU design from April 1984 that Atari was considering for the computer expansion for the 7800 before going with the keyboard design. So I used that design. I went out and ask who would want to have a new case design done and such and then discussions started about adding things on, a POKEY chip, more memory… etc. then the dream lists started to crop up, things were being tossed about and it got out of hand very fast. So, first things first – criteria: the system could only have technology that existed in 84-85 to keep it realistic.

Can you tell us more about your vision for the project?

I am hoping that it will open the door for bigger and more rich games, for older games to have original 2600 audio but then go to POKEY audio when it's sensed. The system has massive potential just in upgrading the audio on games, with the added memory, much more complex games could be achieved as well.

How do you feel about how Atari handled the 7800?

They should've kept some form of contract with GCC, they were the guys who created it and wrote all of the games in the beginning, they could've put out many more great games for it. The advertising side is what hurt probably the most – people forget you if you're not in their face with ads and the Tramiels just didn't do that and that really hurt the image of Atari especially with Nintendo and Sega blasting ads every five minutes at kids.

What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the 7800 as a system?

Its graphics, handling of objects and manipulating data are really its strengths, its lack of a built-in POKEY chip is really its weakness. It can do everything a Nintendo and Sega Master System did and more. It is a far better system when compared to them.



» Atari's console features a universal port, meaning you can stick other controllers in it if you so wish to.

» [Atari 7800] *Bentley Bear's Crystal Quest* is the sequel that everyone has been waiting for.



» [Atari 7800] *Desert Falcon* is one of the most technically impressive games on the 7800.





"It was like stepping out of prison to go to this from the Atari XE. I was able to do some really great things with the 7800"

Chuck Peavey

him about how much of his own design went into the game. "Quite a bit actually. After being given the basic idea, we came up with most of it as we went along. There were two programmers, myself and the guy who did the XE version, and an artist. We would just sit around and throw ideas around. We also got some feedback from Atari." David also programmed the 7800 conversion of *Klax* and he remembers the 7800 being great to work with on a technical level, providing some info on how he made *Ninja Golf*'s impressive visuals. "I remember that there were a limited number of colours available at any one time for display. So the game split the screen up into sections, and used different palettes for each section. This allowed more colours at a time on the screen as a whole, although any one section lived within its limits, this was very easy to do".

Chuck Peavey was the programmer of *Chuck Norris: Missing In Action* for TNT Games and was also impressed by the 7800's MARIA graphics chip. "If you look at *Missing In Action*, you'll see there are a lot of colours. There was so much to work with. For example the waterfall in *MIA* was really cool because we cycled the colours to make it look like it was flowing. I do remember it was super easy to write levels and players. It was like stepping out of prison to go to this from the Atari XE. I was able to do some really great things with the 7800. In fact, it was one of my favourite platforms to work on". Then Chuck laughs as he recalls his time with the 7800 and remembers an interesting story; one that he asks us to heavily edit in case he gets into trouble. "At the same time I was doing *Missing In Action*, Peter Adams was doing a game called *Grandpa's Attic*, starring Grandpa from the TV show *The Munsters*. Peter insisted on doing his own graphics, something I'd given up on before I ever started coding professionally. *Grandpa's Attic* sucked, the gameplay was stilted, the graphics were horrible and it just wasn't that much fun. I didn't feel like I could say anything because Peter was my boss!" We were not surprised to find out that this game was never released.

The legacy of the 7800 today, much like the other Atari consoles actually, is in its bustling homebrew community. No man has had a greater impact on the machine in recent years than Bob DeCrescenzo, who moved to the 7800 after first having released several hacks for the 2600 and 5200. We asked him what made him choose the 7800. "I noticed two things about the 7800," he tells us. Firstly there was no *Pac-Man* at all for it (only *Ms Pac-Man*), and also there weren't many people creating homebrews for it. Those were the main two reasons I moved over to the 7800. I had starting hacking *Ms Pac-Man* into *Pac-Man* and Curt Vendel noticed this and was kind enough to let me see the actual source code for that game to make it easier to know what I was doing. Around that time, they had found the 'encryption code' needed to sign games to work on the NTSC version of the 7800, so I was able to make complete games as I got to know the system better. I enjoyed making/porting games to the 7800 so it just took off from there."

» The original version of Atari's plug and play Flashback console was based on the 7800.



So what makes the 7800 such a good console to code on? "Well its big strengths are handling of sprites, number of colours and backwards compatibility. But I really wish they would have gone with the POKEY as the standard sound chip." Bob would certainly know, having produced excellent games like *Pac-Man Collection*, *Space Invaders*, *Moon Cresta*, *Scramble* and *Bentley Bear's Crystal Quest*. Does Bob still plan to support this greatly underappreciated console though? "Well, I had a good almost ten-year run making games for the 7800. I actually don't have anything planned for the 7800 currently, but with the release of 7800 BASIC, there are already some really good games coming to light."

Perry Thuente is another man making waves in the homebrew world, having just finished a new version of *Donkey Kong* for the machine that takes advantage of the new 7800 Expansion Module. This remake is arcade perfect in every way and arguably the best version for any 8-bit console. He's had a similar route to the 7800 as Bob having also not owned one as a child and has similar thoughts about the hardware's strengths. "The sprite handling was very impressive for the time," he recalls. "It can handle a ton of on-screen objects without any flicker. The sound was definitely the primary weakness." Perry remains embroiled in the console's bustling homebrew scene and remains happy to tinker away on new games. "I have a few projects I would like to work on," he admits. "My first game to use the Yamaha chip in the XM will likely be an update to *Dig Dug*. I'm also interested in porting *Castle Crisis*, a *Warlords* clone, to the machine."

The 7800 might not be as well remembered as its more illustrious rivals the Sega Master System and NES, which is a pity, as it really does deserve a place in your collection. It would be really interesting to imagine how things had played out if Warner had not sold Atari to the Tramiels, but the fact of the matter is that the 7800 was unfairly cut down before it had a chance to properly compete. And yet, Atari's system remains a great console that provided a number of innovations from out-the-box backwards compatibility to digital signatures. It has a solid library of games including some outstanding arcade ports and a vibrant homebrew scene that continues to push the machine to new limits. With the upcoming 7800 XM the future is very bright for the Atari 7800 as it enters its 30th year. *

Special thanks to: David Dentt, Darryl Still, Chuck Peavey, Bob DeCrescenzo, Perry Thuente, Curt Vendel and the Atari Museum.



TOP 10 ARCADE CONVERSIONS

Atari's 7800 has some superb coin-op ports. Here are our favourites



MS PAC-MAN

YEAR: 1987

Programmed by GCC itself, designer of both the 7800 and the *Ms Pac-Man* arcade game, this port is the best for any 8-bit machine. One of the machine's launch games it features all the fruit, all the mazes, all the intermissions and near perfect ghost AI too. It was only surpassed by the homebrew release of Bob DeCrescenzo's *Pac-Man Collection* that includes this game as well as many different versions of both this and the original *Pac-Man* arcade game. This was also the game that got Bob into programming the 7800, lucky us!



JOUST

YEAR: 1987

Williams' 1982 arcade game *Joust* was one of the very first to introduce the concept of cooperative two-player gameplay. It also has to feature one of the wackiest ideas of any arcade game as you control a knight riding a flying ostrich trying to progress through the levels by defeating groups of enemy knights riding buzzards and collecting the eggs. The 7800 version is easily the most impressive for any 8-bit machine and is nigh-on arcade perfect. This is also without doubt one of the best multiplayer experiences to be had on the machine.



COMMANDO

YEAR: 1989

Sculptured Software did an amazing job of porting the popular Capcom coin-op to the 7800 and this remains one of the best versions of the game on any platform of the time. As well as looking superb, Atari allowed the programmers to use a POKEY chip on the cartridge for enhanced sound. The arcade game's soundtrack has been replicated brilliantly using the four-channel chip and all the sound effects are provided by the native TIA. 7800 *Commando* is incredibly impressive and really shows what the 7800 is capable of in the right hands.



CENTIPEDE

YEAR: 1987

Don't be put off by the slightly rough looking graphics of this port, 7800 *Centipede* actually manages to improve upon its arcade parent. This is because Atari chose to include a fantastic two-player mode that allows you to team up with one of your friends to take out the hordes of insects, mushroom patches and the imposing centipede himself! Interestingly Atari also planned to release the sequel *Millipede* for the 7800 and despite it being rumoured that it was finished the game has never seen the light of day, still 7800 *Centipede* is more than fulfilling.

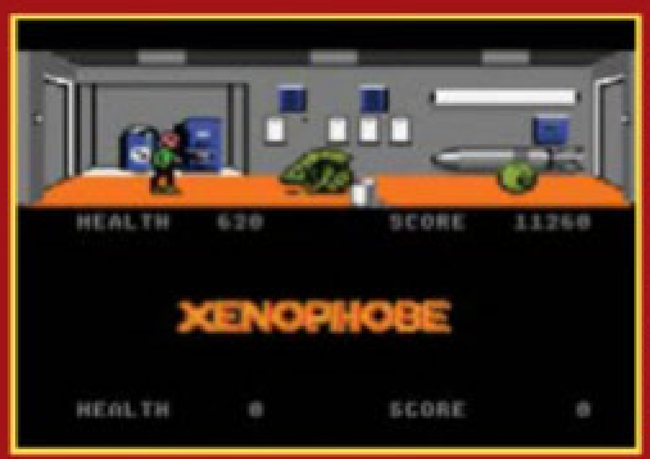


FOOD FIGHT

YEAR: 1987

The original *Food Fight* coin-op was designed and created by GCC, so it's no surprise to see this game on the 7800. It also won't be a surprise to learn that this is one of the best games on the machine! Just as you did in the 1983 arcade game you take the role of Charley Chuck as he runs around the screen throwing food at angry chefs and trying to eat the ice cream before it melts. *Food Fight* is insanely fun and we really do think it's criminal that this game was never converted to more home consoles. It gives us all a good reason to own a 7800 though!





XENOPHOBE

YEAR: 1989

■ We have always been huge fans of this 1987 Bally/Midway arcade game at **Retro Gamer**. A sprawling shoot-'em-up that takes heavy inspiration from the *Aliens* movie, the original coin-op was particularly notable for its split-screen three-player gameplay. While none of the home versions could replicate that many of them went for a split-screen two-player option instead, this version included. The Atari 7800 version of *Xenophobe* is massive and has some rather pretty visuals that make it far more impressive than its NES counterpart.



KUNG-FU MASTER

YEAR: 1989

■ Irem's 1984 arcade game *Kung-Fu Master* is widely credited as being the first ever scrolling beat-'em-up. It was converted to pretty much every system under the sun at the time but this 7800 port by Activision is one of the best. It features far more detailed graphics than the well-known NES port and also has some remarkably good TIA music too. The 7800 is actually well blessed for scrolling beat-'em-ups with the iconic *Ninja Golf* and a decent conversion of *Double Dragon* but *Kung-Fu Master* is still well worth checking out – you won't be disappointed!



DONKEY KONG

YEAR: 1988

■ It seems strange to many that the 7800 got ports of both *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Junior* when they were also launch games for the NES. This is because Nintendo had already licensed the games to Atari, which had released them for the Atari 8-bit computers, and so could not stop it releasing 7800 versions. Both *Donkey Kong* games stand up very well against the NES versions too. While this version is not arcade perfect that has now been rectified by the homebrew version of *Donkey Kong* that can be downloaded to try for free.



DIG DUG

YEAR: 1987

■ Namco's wacky 1982 arcade game *Dig Dug* was licensed for release in the West by Atari and despite its strange concept the game was one of the biggest hits of the 'golden age' of arcade games. This made it an easy choice for 7800 conversion and this version is one of the best out there. The rich and colourful graphics, impressive sound and addictive gameplay all add up to give you one of the best arcade experiences that can be had on the Atari 7800.

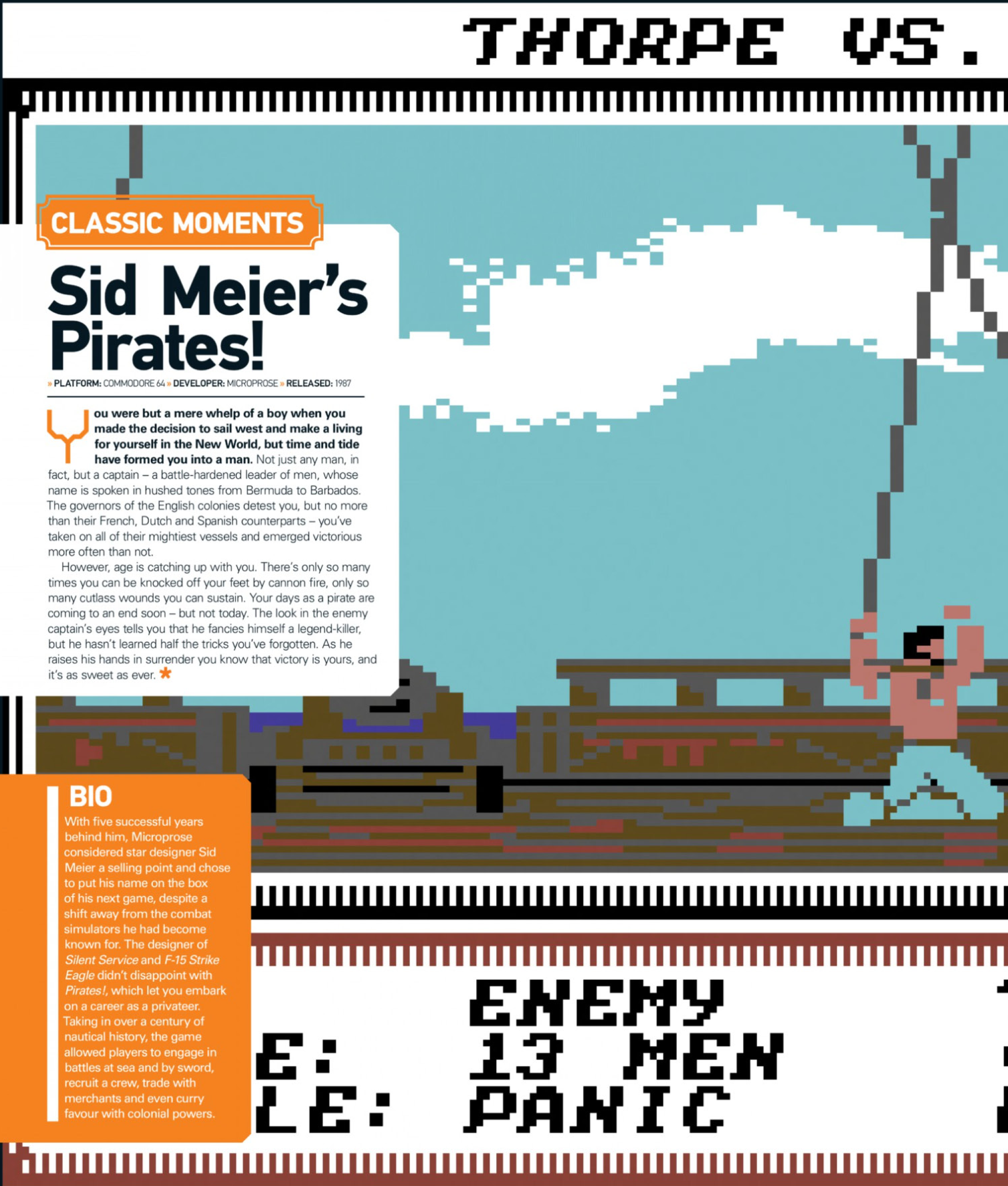


MARIO BROS

YEAR: 1988

■ One of three Nintendo games to appear on the 7800, it perhaps seems even stranger that *Mario Bros* is on an Atari machine than *Donkey Kong*. The 1983 arcade game was not only the first game to use the Mario name (he was previously known as Jumpman) but also the first one to introduce us to his brother Luigi and his career as a platforming plumber. Many of the attributes that made up the *Super Mario* games are seen in this early game and the simultaneous two-player action provides more than its fair share of fun!





CLASSIC MOMENTS

Sid Meier's Pirates!

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** MICROPROSE » **RELEASED:** 1987

You were but a mere whelp of a boy when you made the decision to sail west and make a living for yourself in the New World, but time and tide have formed you into a man. Not just any man, in fact, but a captain – a battle-hardened leader of men, whose name is spoken in hushed tones from Bermuda to Barbados. The governors of the English colonies detest you, but no more than their French, Dutch and Spanish counterparts – you've taken on all of their mightiest vessels and emerged victorious more often than not.

However, age is catching up with you. There's only so many times you can be knocked off your feet by cannon fire, only so many cutlass wounds you can sustain. Your days as a pirate are coming to an end soon – but not today. The look in the enemy captain's eyes tells you that he fancies himself a legend-killer, but he hasn't learned half the tricks you've forgotten. As he raises his hands in surrender you know that victory is yours, and it's as sweet as ever. *

BIO

With five successful years behind him, Microprose considered star designer Sid Meier a selling point and chose to put his name on the box of his next game, despite a shift away from the combat simulators he had become known for. The designer of *Silent Service* and *F-15 Strike Eagle* didn't disappoint with *Pirates!*, which let you embark on a career as a privateer. Taking in over a century of nautical history, the game allowed players to engage in battles at sea and by sword, recruit a crew, trade with merchants and even curry favour with colonial powers.



MORE CLASSIC SID MEIER'S PIRATES! MOMENTS

Setting sail



Weighing anchor for the first time and setting off on your first voyage is a fantastic moment. The game area is huge, stretching from the Florida peninsula to the northern shores of South America, meaning that the map was truly a necessity – without it, you'd more than likely wind up dying of starvation on the coast of Honduras.

Ready the cannons



Naval combat is a tense affair played out from a top-down perspective. Bigger ships allow for greater firepower, but smaller ships are more agile, providing some level of balance. You also get the chance to make attacks on land-based targets, with towns defended by forts. Any time you can escape from a nail-biting encounter with a frigate, you'll feel pretty good.

Pillage and plunder

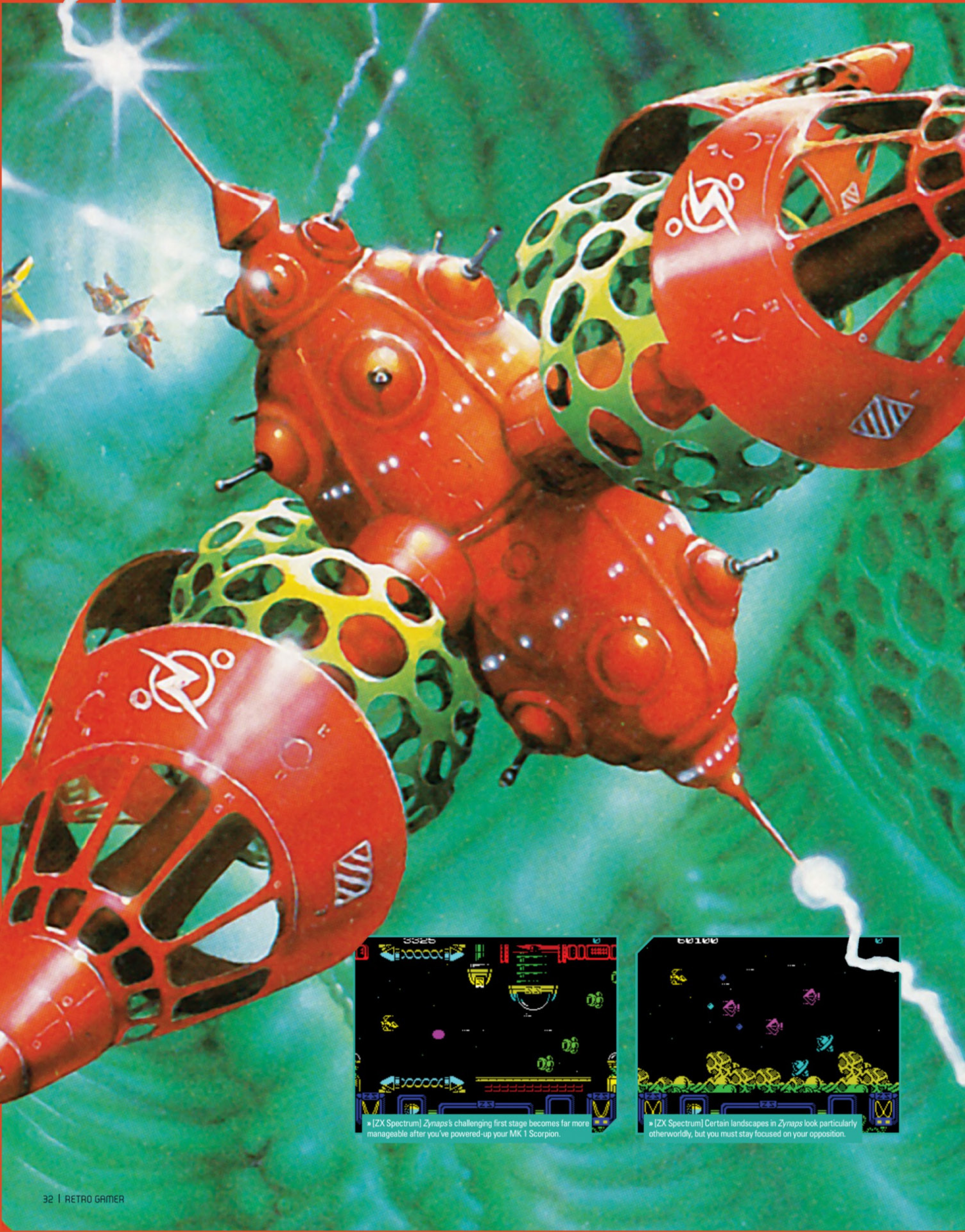


Once you've successfully boarded the enemy's vessel, victory in battle awards you the opportunity to take the boat as a prize or plunder and sink it. Your decision will depend heavily on what you're trying to achieve – some vessels will be much more advantageous to traders than combatants, for example – but choosing to ransack your victims is always satisfying.

X marks the spot



It's all well and good to make your living by selling sugar or getting cosy with the colonists, but that's far too historically accurate. When most of us think of pirates, we long for the adventure of setting sail towards uninhabited territory, lured by the promise of unimaginable riches. Obtaining a map is your first step – you won't find anything without it.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Zynaps's* challenging first stage becomes far more manageable after you've powered-up your MK 1 Scorpion.

» [ZX Spectrum] Certain landscapes in *Zynaps* look particularly otherworldly, but you must stay focused on your opposition.

ZYNAPS



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
» **DEVELOPER:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP



Dominic Robinson achieved the seemingly impossible with his first game when he delivered a faithful Spectrum version of Uridium. Rory Milne learns how Dominic's follow-up took inspiration from Konami's Nemesis and became the instant classic, Zynaps

DOMINIC ROBINSON REFLECTS ON HIS DAYS AS HEWSON'S NEWEST STAR-DEVELOPER: "IT was a great time to be working in the industry. Myself and John Cumming were the only two in-house developers at the time and were left largely to our own devices. The earlier success of the Spectrum version of *Uridium* meant that I was given relatively free rein to build on this by developing *Zynaps*. With *Uridium*, there was a huge buzz from making something that captured the feel of the original. The colour limitations on the Spectrum were always a frustration, especially for scrolling games, but doing something colourful felt like the next step after *Uridium*."

Given how impressive the young developer's first effort had been, it would be reasonable to expect that this colourful next step would place him under a certain amount of pressure. But as Dominic explains, far from being fazed he was instead sizing-up an even greater challenge. "I don't remember feeling daunted. We [were] pretty much free to build the best thing that we could and each game at that time pushed the machines harder than the one before so you always felt that more was possible. The original idea was to make a shooter in the same vein as *Nemesis*, or at least see how close I could get on the Spectrum. All of the arcade shooters at the time that we could get our hands on to play had some influence – which wasn't as much as we'd have liked in Didcot where Hewson was based. I remember some trips to London and elsewhere where the pickings were richer, though. I remember *Nemesis* in particular being an inspiration, the Easter Island heads level in particular. I wanted to get as close as possible to the feel of games of that era such as *Nemesis* and others of its type."

Having found their inspiration, Dominic and John got to work. Hewson freelancer and 8-bit wizard Stephen Crow was brought in on graphics duties, and the trio opted to develop the game for two systems simultaneously, although for technical reasons Dominic's Spectrum version took the lead. "Work began with developing the graphics engine for the scrolling to see how big a play area would be possible and the number of sprites that could be drawn at the required frame rate," Dominic explains. "I wrote the Spectrum version while John did the C64 one, [we] worked independently on the code, but we played everything and contributed ideas. Most of the level designs came from the Spectrum version, which was developed ▶

EVENT HORIZON

More memorable horizontally-scrolling shooters



DEFENDER

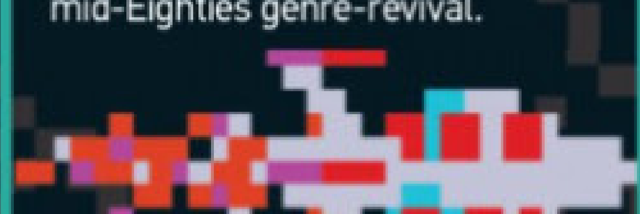
SYSTEM: Arcade **YEAR:** 1980

■ You can't discuss side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups without mentioning Eugene Jarvis's groundbreaking *Defender*. It's one of the very earliest examples of the genre, but more importantly it still looks, sounds and plays as well as it did on release.

SCRAMBLE

SYSTEM: Arcade **YEAR:** 1981

■ Responsible for introducing forced scrolling to horizontally-scrolling shooters and for popularising tropes like bombing ground targets while blasting oncoming opponents, Konami's *Scramble* created a template for a mid-Eighties genre-revival.





NEMESIS

SYSTEM: Arcade **YEAR:** 1985

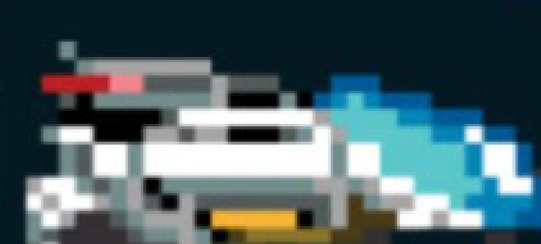
■ The influence *Nemesis* – or *Gradius* as it's now better known – had on horizontal shoot-'em-ups can't be understated. Aside from kick-starting a long-running Konami franchise, *Nemesis* revitalised the sub-genre and ushered in its golden age.

DARIUS

SYSTEM: Arcade **YEAR:** 1986

■ Taito's often-overlooked *Darius* really does need to have a higher profile. The game's colossal triple-screen-sized display allows for complex enemy attack patterns and cinematic boss encounters all sumptuously realised in beautiful pixel art.





R-TYPE

SYSTEM: Arcade **YEAR:** 1987

■ Arguably Irem's finest moment – and certainly one of the side-scrolling shooter genre's most celebrated – *R-Type* built on and refined what had come before but cranked the difficulty level way up by demanding pixel-perfect navigation from the player.



» [ZX Spectrum] Alien motherships provide *Zynaps*'s toughest boss-battles with smart-bombs being their chosen weapon.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CYBERNOID (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

PARADROID
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1985

EXOLON
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

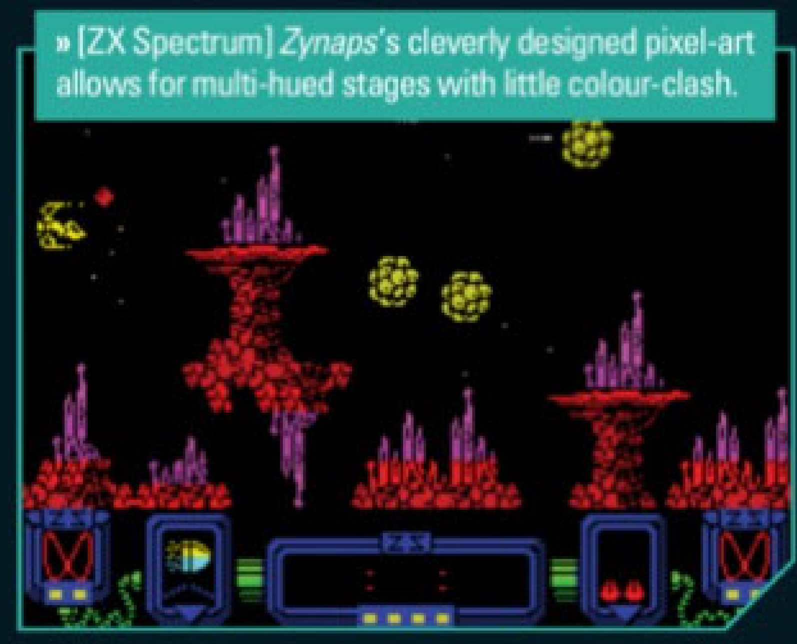
ahead of the C64 version, largely because the development tools for the Z80 were so much faster than those that John had available for the 6502. Stephen Crow did the original graphics work for the levels, which were then stretched further using a system that recombined the components in different ways to make new features. The sprites for the ships, aliens and weapons were a mixture of originals from Stephen plus additional ones from myself and John. We also wrote a program that would evolve 16x16 sprites from a basic design using simple genetic mutation. After each evolution we selected the ones we liked as the basis for the next generation, a few of these made it into he game. Inspiration for this came from Richard Dawkins' 1986 book *The Blind Watchmaker*. The details of the gameplay evolved later as each new level was developed."

Levels weren't going to be something that *Zynaps* lacked, but as Dominic remembers, the proposed scope of the game required some pretty tight coding. This thankfully took place on more stable development kit than *Uridium* had, but John still had to suffer for his art. "*Zynaps* was written almost entirely from scratch," he explains. "There were probably small pieces that were used from *Uridium*, but the extreme memory pressures meant that everything was highly tuned for what it was doing. I remember using a variety of self-modifying code techniques to keep things as compact and fast as possible. We used Amstrad PCW 8512 computers with dual 3" floppy drives and 512Kb of RAM running CP/M. The software was written using the Wordstar word processing software. For the Z80 on the Spectrum I used the ZASM assembler from Research Machines and the SLR Super-linker, both terrific pieces of software. For the C64's 6502 John had to use the Avocet cross-assembler, which was dreadful. I think it used to take over half an hour to build the C64 version versus a couple of minutes for the Spectrum. These systems felt luxurious compared to what we had used previously. You don't know real fear until you've run an assembler on a Spectrum using Sinclair Microdrives that could self-destruct and destroy your source code every time you assembled it! For *Uridium*, I had also used a Spectrum system with 5.5" floppies but these were so primitive that you had to reformat the floppies every time they filled up. Once the assembler and linker had completed we would download the code to the Spectrum or C64 using RS232 serial drivers."

As Dominic and John continued coding, Stephen steadily produced visuals, which he delivered in instalments. "Stephen would bring new graphics over as they were completed, which provided further inspiration. We used his graphics both as-is and by breaking them up and reassembling them into new forms enabling us to get more out of the limited memory available. I think the direction for these followed from the style of arcade games of the time. *Nemesis* and others had environments mixing hi-tech and organic 'alien' looking features – which *Zynaps* sought to emulate. Stephen had a graphics editor that he had written himself that he used for the graphics work he did for us and his own games. Once he gave graphics to us, we broke them up into 8x8 pixel fragments that were



» [ZX Spectrum] Hybrid scenery made up of previous landscapes appears in later levels.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Zynaps*'s cleverly designed pixel-art allows for multi-hued stages with little colour-clash.

MORE FROM DOM

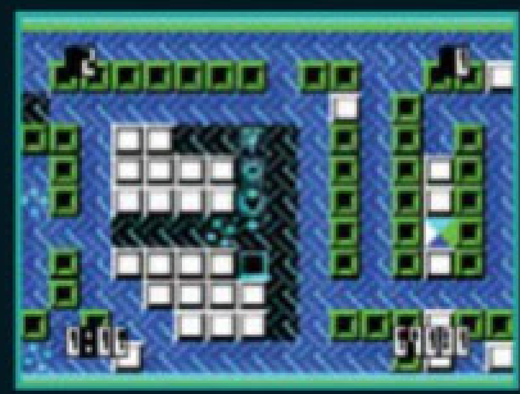
Other must-play titles Dominic Robinson worked on



URIDIUM

SYSTEM: ZX Spectrum
YEAR: 1986

■ Dominic sent Hewson his *Uridium* demo in response to an ad looking for coders and it asked him to write a complete conversion. He re-wrote his Spectrum *Uridium* ten times before he felt that it accurately replicated the original Commodore 64 shooter.



ANARCHY

SYSTEM: ZX Spectrum
YEAR: 1987

■ Released on Hewson's Rack-It budget label, *Anarchy* is a top-down shoot-'em-up with puzzle elements. Dominic's port of Michael Sentinella's C64 tank versus droids block-buster is simple but addictive with slick animation and colourful visuals.



FLYING SHARK

SYSTEM: ZX Spectrum
YEAR: 1987

■ The first official coin-op adaptation Dominic worked on saw him on familiar ground working with *Zynaps* cohort John Cumming on Taito's scrolling shooter *Flying Shark*. The pair's debut Graftgold title was monochrome but nicely emulated the original.



RAINBOW ISLANDS

SYSTEM: Amiga, ST
YEAR: 1989

■ Technically Dominic didn't work on Graftgold's 16-bit *Rainbow Islands* ports, but the titles' coder Andrew Braybrook did use Dom's custom development program – Object Oriented Programming System, or OOPS for short.



PARADROID 90

SYSTEM: Amiga, ST
YEAR: 1990

■ As with *Rainbow Islands*, Andrew Braybrook made good use of Dominic's OOPS system to code the sequel to his C64 classic *Paradroid*. Judging by a *Paradroid 90* development diary Andrew kept Dom also provided technical support for his system.



SIMULCRA

SYSTEM: Amiga, ST
YEAR: 1990

■ Dominic finally got to create a game of his own using OOPS when developing *Simulcra* – a highly impressive 3D filled-polygon shooter with power-ups, which alternates between maze-based seek and destroy missions and outer space combat.

> "Michael would come to the Hewson offices with his Amstrad and a camper van loaded with beer"
> Dominic Robinson

then reassembled – both as originally intended and in new ways – using a hierarchical macro language that was used to encode the layouts in a space-efficient way. Pieces could be re-used and assembled into larger sections with very little memory usage. This was an extension of the technique that had been used for encoding the levels in the Spectrum version of *Uridium*. I remember Stephen being surprised – in a good way – at some of the levels that we managed to build with graphics he had designed for other things. The scrolling engine drove the basic requirements, setting the limits on how much could be displayed at one time, but after that the gameplay, code and graphics evolved together."

Zynaps's core gameplay would revolve around a system inspired by contemporary arcade shooters but efficiently reworked for one-button joysticks where players would cycle through and power-up weapons by collecting fuel and activate them by holding down fire. Dominic's memories of these elegant mechanics have faded slightly, but he does remember striving for intuitive controls. "I forget the details now, but they would have evolved along with the other gameplay elements. We wrote code, tried it out, then threw it away or tweaked until we found something that was good to play. I think we tried everything. Making sure that the controls felt and worked well was essential. In all the best arcade games they became second nature and didn't get in the way of you playing the game. That was what we were after."

ASIDE FROM WELL-WORKED MECHANICS, ZYNAPS WOULD ALSO BOAST FAST, SLICK SCROLLING WHICH, as Dominic reveals, was no simple task to perform on the Spectrum. "The toughest part was making everything fit in memory and the available CPU cycles," he admits. "I used to know the timing of every instruction on the Z80. To update the scrolling screen on the Spectrum without visible tearing the software-renderer chased the TV raster beam down the screen. After the vertical retrace interrupt at the top of the TV display it waited until the beam had passed the first row on the screen before redrawing those pixels, and so on down the screen. This maximised the number of CPU cycles that could be used for redrawing everything. Drawing each line had to take a certain amount of time to avoid catching up or overtaking the screen refresh, so the code had to keep track of how much time it had spent and insert delays on lines that had little redraw activity."

Like *Zynaps*'s trying development process, playing Dominic's game would represent a stiff challenge, but this was by design. John Cumming's C64 counterpart was even tougher. Freelancer Michael Croucher made sure the Amstrad version was no pushover and also supplied refreshments. "There was quite a difference between the Spectrum and C64 versions in part because the level designs originated on the Spectrum version and were then adapted for the C64. The C64 version ended up being a lot more difficult in places. I remember my approach being to make sure I could only just play it myself in the hardest sections, knowing that there were always better players out there. The Amstrad version was done by Michael Croucher based on the Spectrum and C64 versions. Michael mostly worked remotely. We did play a lot of each version, though. Michael would come to the Hewson offices in Didcot with his Amstrad and a camper van loaded with beer to catch up on development. We drove it to Scotland one weekend on a whim rather than work on the code!"

Dominic's memories of how long *Zynaps* took him to complete and are a little hazy, but he does remember being pleased by Steve Turner's music and sound effects and by the glowing reviews *Zynaps* received. "I think it probably took about six months, but I can't remember exactly," he confesses. "This could of course have been 'programmer time' with the reality being longer. The music was done independently, I don't remember at which stage. Steve always did a great job on his Spectrum music. The sound effects used Steve's sound effects engine and an explosion effect that I built into the rest of the code using spare cycles. The backstory I don't remember, but the cover art was distinctive. I was very pleased with the results and the reception the game received. This was the first commercial game that I had built from scratch, *Uridium* having been a conversion of Andrew Braybrook's seminal C64 original."

Asked about the later Amiga and ST versions of his 8-bit classic, Dominic recalls: "I remember seeing them, but don't remember playing them to any extent. By the time they came out myself and John had left Hewson and were working at Graftgold with Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook on new projects that had us pretty busy."

Given the final word on *Zynaps* and its enduring popularity, Dominic's clear how proud he still is. "It was a product of its time, and I think it has stood up well. I remember enjoying that time enormously. It is great that these old creations still have a life!" *

Many thanks to Dominic for his detailed and fascinating account.



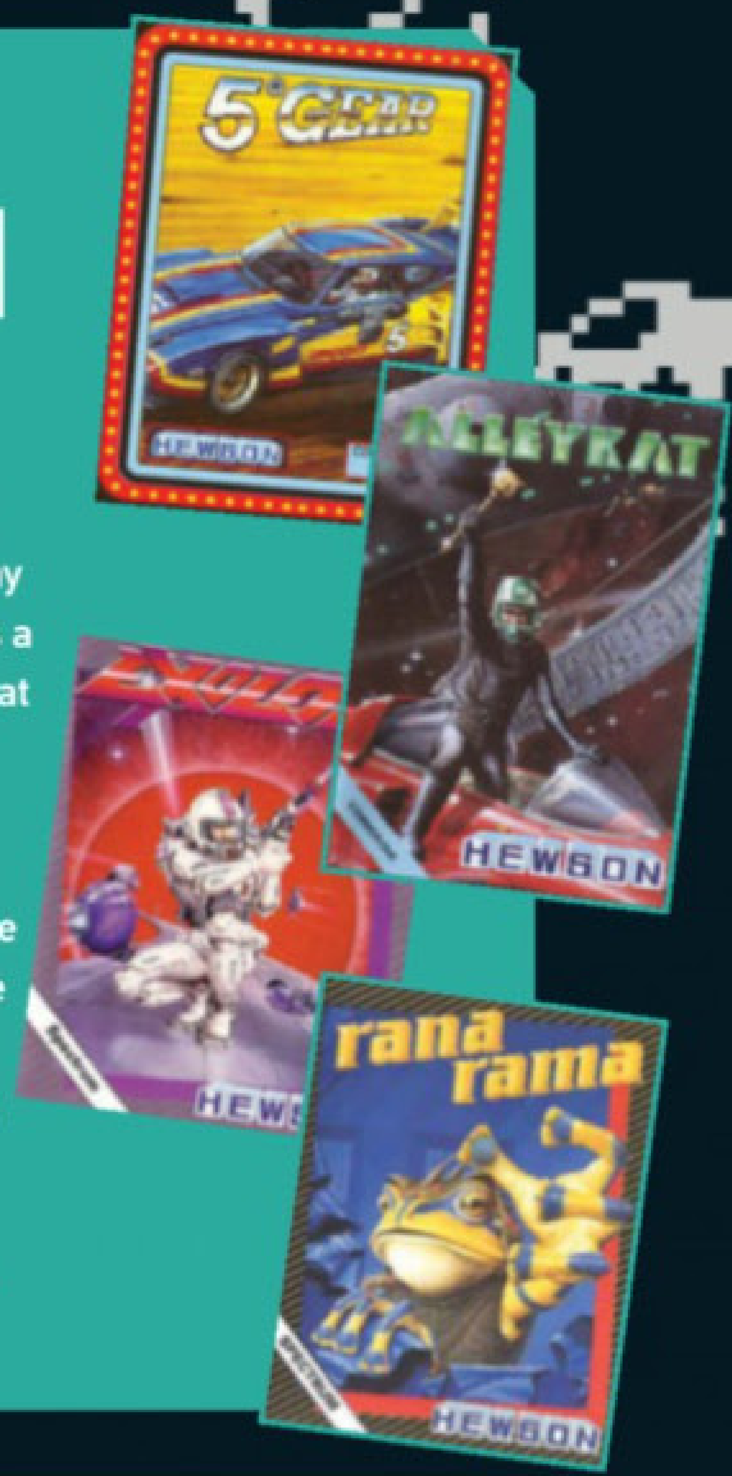
» [ZX Spectrum] You fight *Zynaps*'s motherships several times but each battle is more challenging than the last.

REMEMBERING STEVE WESTON

Retro Gamer pays tribute to the popular graphic artist

The first thing you notice about *Zynaps* is its incredible box art. It was the work of Steve Weston, who sadly passed away in 2011 at the age of 62. Born in Bournemouth, he moved as a young child to Chipping Norton, and took a graphics course at Oxford Polytechnic.

He eventually became a freelance illustrator, becoming noted for his distinctive artwork that adorned everything from album covers to magazines. He's well known in science fiction circles for the air-brushed pieces he created for Anne MaCaffrey's *Perm*, *Crystal Singer* and *Pegasus* series, but gamers will mainly remember him for his excellent Hewson artwork. In addition to *Zynaps*, he drew covers for a slew of popular Hewson games, including *Exolon*, *Alleykat*, *Ranarama*, *Onslaught*, *Gunrunner* and the popular Hewson Lizard logo that ran from 1988-1991.





» [ZX Spectrum] *Zynaps*'s ultimate boss-battle has you face a snake-like lifeform that spits out smart-bombs.



TOP 25 ATARI 8-BIT GAMES

Retro Gamer readers have voted for their favourite games on the Atari 8-bit family – join Nick Thorpe for the countdown of the best passengers carried by "the Porsche of home computers"



Montezuma's Revenge

■ **DEVELOPER:** ROBERT JAEGER
■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

25 **It's rare that** we ever feature a game whose title is a reference to diarrhoea, let alone feature it in a Top 25 list, but the adventures of Panama Joe have long been a favourite of gamers. *Montezuma's Revenge* saw players finding keys to open doors on their way to the treasure chamber, while dodging all manner of hazards.

Space Harrier

■ **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS HUTT
■ **YEAR:** 2011 ■ **GENRE:** RAIL SHOOTER

24 **Get ready! Sega's** arcade hit was converted to many platforms in its Eighties heyday, but the Atari 8-bit family was left out in the cold. Over 25 years later, homebrew coder Chris Hutt righted that wrong with a stunning conversion that trumps all of the contemporary computer efforts. Authenticity is the key here – arcade stages are replicated with a high level of accuracy, bosses and bonus stages are included, and there's even some excellent speech in there. It's simply incredible to see Seventies hardware providing such a faithful rendition of a technically demanding coin-op.





Yoomp!

■ **DEVELOPER:** YOOMP! TEAM
■ **YEAR:** 2007 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION

23 **The homebrew scene** is strong on Atari's machine, and *Yoomp!* is one of the best examples of its output. Created by a team of four Polish coders, the game puts you in control of a bouncing ball travelling through a cylinder, which you must steer around gaps to reach the end. It's all vaguely reminiscent of *Trailblazer*. The impressive presentation includes some of the best music ever generated by a POKEY chip, but it's the addictive gameplay that makes it well worth seeking out.



Pole Position

DEVELOPER: ATARI

YEAR: 1983 **GENRE:** RACING

22 **Atari got a** great deal with *Pole Position* – as well as getting the opportunity to bring Namco's incredibly popular arcade game to the lucrative American market, it got the home conversion rights. The results were pleasing for Atari fans on all formats. The 2600 got a rather impressive conversion considering the limitations of the system, while the more powerful Atari 8-bit family (and the 5200, which was similar) received a closer conversion.

While *Pole Position* retains presentation features like the "prepare to qualify" message being carried by blimp, it isn't a fantastically attractive game to look at, with boxy cars and blank roadside signs and a sensation of speed that just seems slightly lacking. However, the core gameplay remains intact, which is what gets it into the list – the handling carries across well and the arcade racing thrill of dodging other cars and roadside objects never dulls.

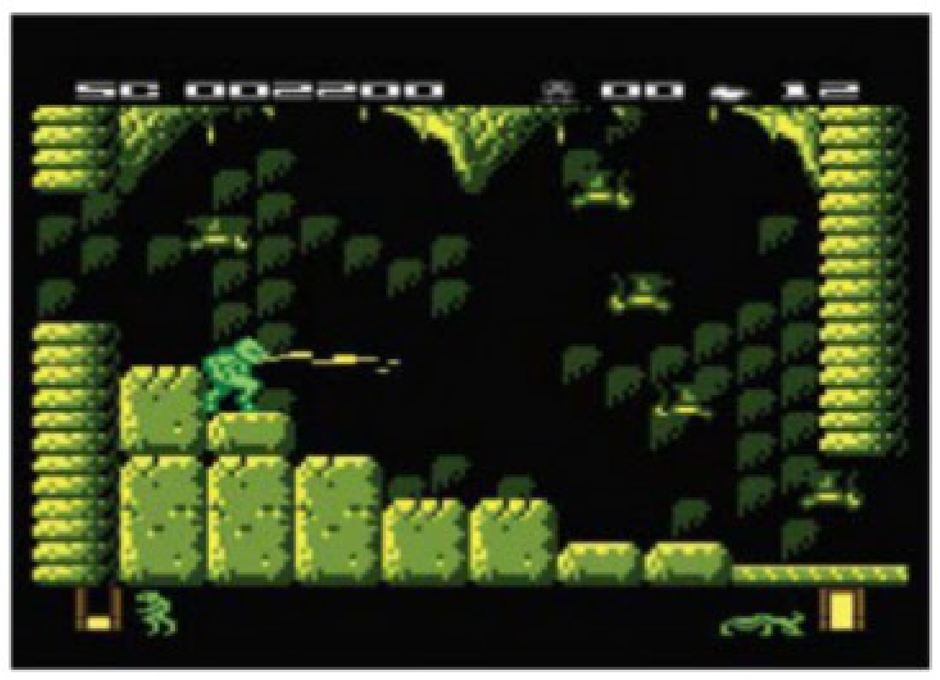
Draconus

DEVELOPER: COGNITO

YEAR: 1988 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

21 **By 1988, software** support for Atari's 8-bit line had long since passed its peak – the computers had been available for the best part of a decade and the Atari ST was established on the market. However, Cognito showed that there was still life in the old hardware, delivering a stellar platformer in the form of *Draconus*.

Draconus tasked you with taking down the evil Tyrant Beast, in a platform adventure that took place across dozens of visually impressive screens. But while the presentation is impressive, it's the structure of *Draconus* that is unusual on the Atari 8-bits. The game follows the platforming template laid down by *Metroid* – new abilities enable Frognum to reach previously inaccessible areas of the large, open map. Combined with solid platforming mechanics, it couldn't fail. Plus, we're fans of games that allow you to defeat enemies by breathing fire.



Elektra Glide

DEVELOPER: ADAM BILLYARD

YEAR: 1985 **GENRE:** RACINGR

20 ***Elektra Glide*** **is** an entry that is inevitably bound to cause controversy, but enough votes were cast to get it into the list. Adam Billyard's survival racing game is a technical marvel on Atari's hardware, thanks to its wonderfully colourful visuals. As well as absolutely nailing the road movement and sensation of speed, the game includes scenery such as tunnels and trees. The music is also amongst the best on the system. If you want a game to show off what the Atari 8-bit family can do, *Elektra Glide* must be amongst your leading options.

The controversy arises when the gameplay is taken into account. *Elektra Glide* is a racing game, but your only real opponent is the clock as no other vehicles are present. Your goal is to reach checkpoints, avoiding the numerous obstacles that litter the road. Between this unusual approach and the tricky steering, some players have decided that *Elektra Glide* is all style and no substance. However, we're inclined to disagree – we find that obstacle-dodging at high speed is an enjoyable task, particularly if you take the time to try the game's three handling modes.



Rainbow Walker

DEVELOPER: STEVE COLEMAN

YEAR: 1983 **GENRE:** ACTION

19 **Playing rather like** *Q*bert* or *Skweek*, but on a scrolling multicoloured ring, *Rainbow Walker* is an action game that shows off the system's graphical capabilities nicely. We're rather fond of the moving-platform bonus stages too, as they're a good observational test for players.



Spelunker

DEVELOPER: BRØDERBUND SOFTWARE

YEAR: 1984 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

18 **Sometimes small sprites** are underwhelming, but not so in *Spelunker*, where they simply enhance the sense of scale by making the caverns look huge. You'll often come back for one more expedition to see what it holds – especially if you lose your last life to the ghost.

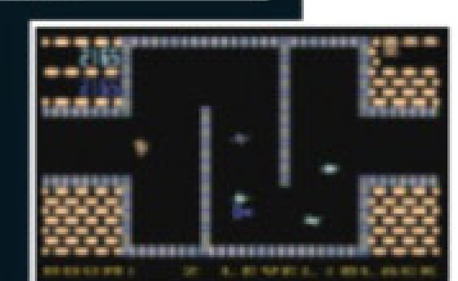


Shamus

DEVELOPER: CATHRYN MATAGA

YEAR: 1982 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

17 ***Shamus*** **promises that** it "can only be mastered by a long and arduous training period", and it's not kidding. Relentless enemies and electrified walls will lead you to countless deaths as you attempt to make your way through the deadly maze and defeat The Shadow.



Rally Speedway

DEVELOPER: JOHN ANDERSON

YEAR: 1983 **GENRE:** RACING

16 **John Anderson got** this racer right, with responsive handling, great visuals, a multiplayer mode and a crash animation that saw your racer emerging from his car in flames. Though the game only came with two tracks, the track design function allowed endless fun for imaginative gamers.

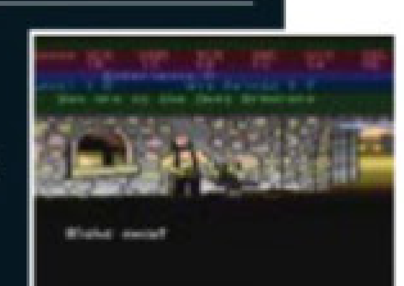


Alternate Reality: The City

DEVELOPER: PARADISE PROGRAMMING

YEAR: 1985 **GENRE:** RPG

15 **Philip Price's RPG** is elevated by some fantastic presentation, including an excellent cinematic introduction, 3D environments and some excellent music from Gary Gilbertson. Impressively, characters from *The City* could be transferred to the sequel, *Alternate Reality: The Dungeon*.



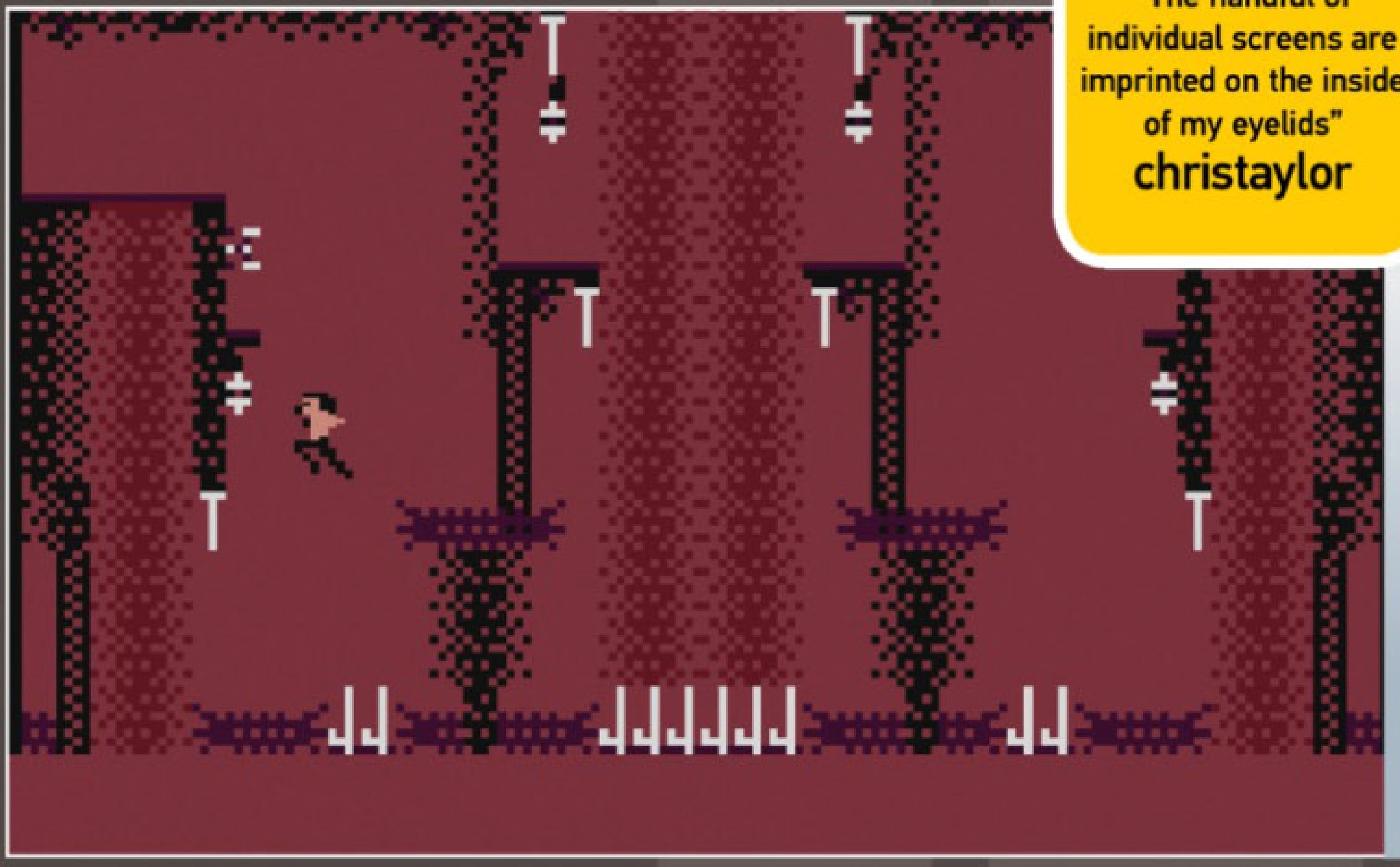


Bruce Lee

■ **DEVELOPER:** DATASOFT
■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

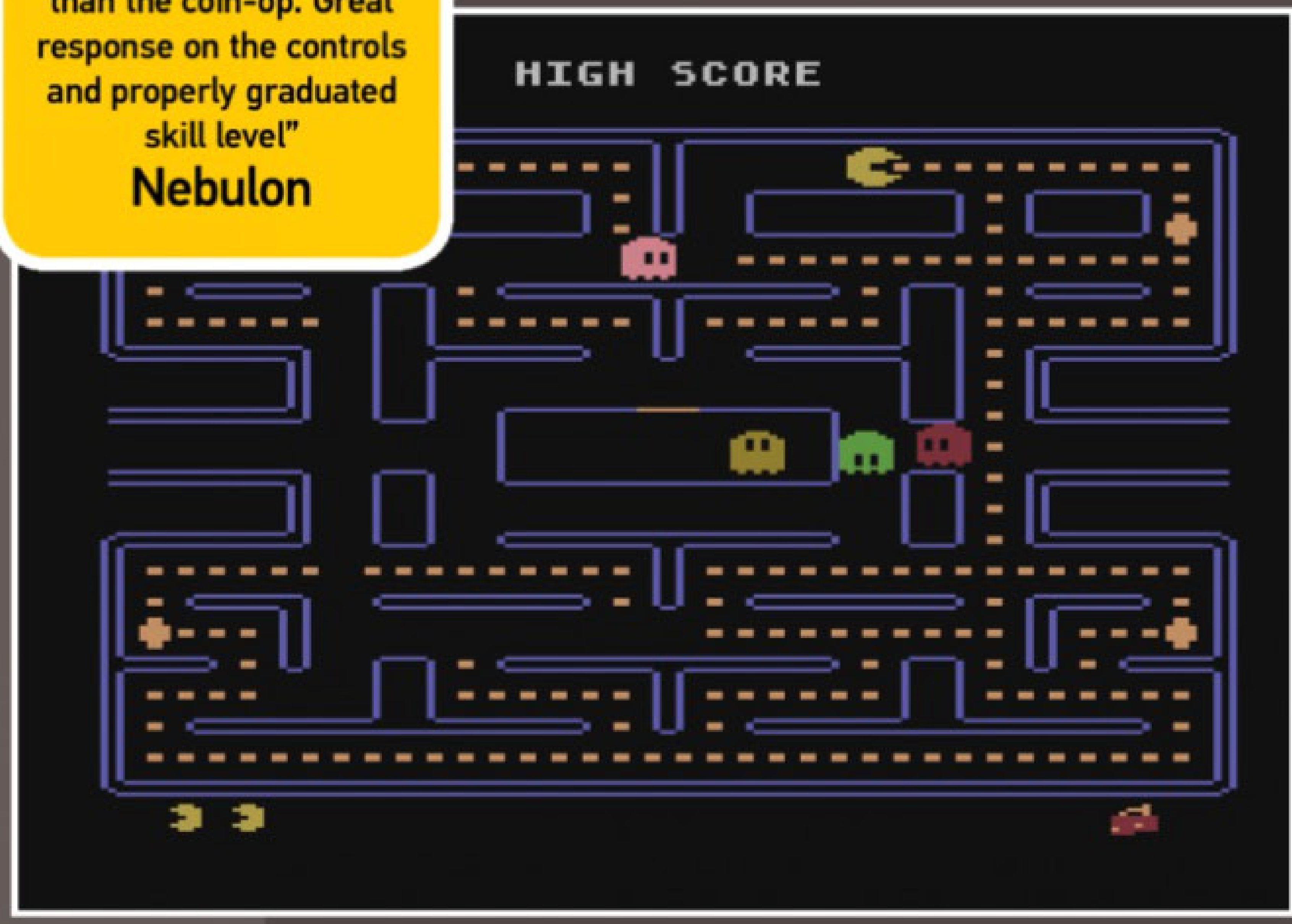
14 **Bruce Lee might** have met his tragic demise over a decade before this game was released, but his star power has never diminished and neither has the appeal of this classic platformer. The famous martial artist is tasked with collecting lanterns in order to open up new areas and find the evil wizard. Meanwhile, a ninja and Green Yamo are determined to stop you, chiefly by pulverising you in hand-to-hand combat.

While the adventure is a compelling proposition for the lone player, multiplayer is where it really comes alive. The second player can take control of Green Yamo and attempt to prevent him from achieving his goal. Suddenly, the game goes from being merely a platformer with beat-'em-up elements to a rage-fuelled fight to the death across a variety of deadly stages. It's a superb mode we'd like to see more often.



"The handful of individual screens are imprinted on the inside of my eyelids"
christaylor

"I actually enjoy this version even more than the coin-op. Great response on the controls and properly graduated skill level"
Nebulon



Pac-Man

■ **DEVELOPER:** ATARI
■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** MAZE GAME

13 **When you think** of Atari and *Pac-Man*, it's likely that your thoughts will immediately turn to the Atari 2600 conversion of Namco's enduring arcade game, a notoriously sub-par release that still attracts venom. That's a shame, because the version released for Atari's 8-bit computers is a closer conversion that falls short of arcade perfection but delivers a much better experience than its console counterpart.

For starters, the maze itself has the same layout as the *Pac-Man* coin-op, instantly making it a much more recognisable piece of software. Graphical improvements play their part, too – ghosts are now displayed in four different colours and don't exhibit awful flicker. Homebrew coders have tried to top Atari's conversion, but it's the impact of a good home version that secures *Pac-Man*'s spot in our list.

Alley Cat

■ **DEVELOPER:** BILL WILLIAMS
■ **YEAR:** 1983 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

12 ***Alley Cat* is** certainly one of the more bizarre games on this list, and a fantastic example of the kind of creativity was abundant in the gaming market of the early Eighties. The game explores the life of an alley cat – jumping through people's windows, catching mice, avoiding dogs and finding love with other cats.

However, seemingly simply because it's funny, the game takes these scenarios to bizarre conclusions. For example, catching mice involves jumping across a gigantic, room-filling block of cheese. When your cat dives into what appears to be a goldfish bowl, it's actually jumping into a vast expanse of water that also happens to be populated by electric eels. The bizarre interludes have clearly worked in the game's favour though, as they complement the solid gameplay and make for an experience that is memorable.



Ballblazer

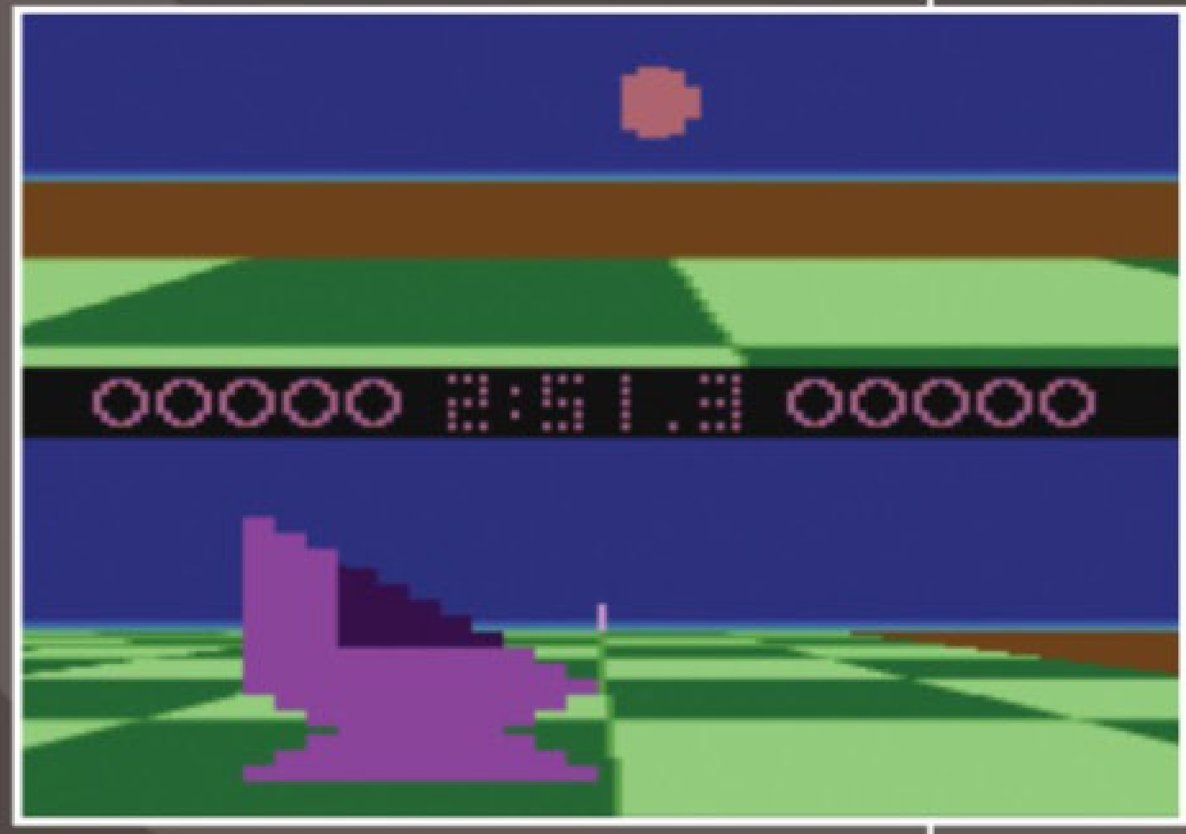
■ **DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
■ **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** FUTURISTIC SPORTS

11 **It's telling that** all four of the Lucasfilm Games developments received votes for inclusion on this list – the company was simply one of the best developers on the system during its brief support, delivering technically impressive games that also played extremely well. *Ballblazer* is one of the two that makes it in and it's a great example of the qualities mentioned. A fast-paced future sports title loosely based on football, the goal of the game is simple – steer your Rotofoil towards the ball, take it towards the opponent's goal beams and shoot it through to score.

The game was good on a technical level, featuring a simple visual style that allowed for a smooth update and excellent pseudo-scaling effects. However, the key technical achievement was the split-screen presentation, which allowed for multiplayer action without compromising the excellent first-person viewpoint for either player. That multiplayer mode turned out to be the most important thing, as the competitive gameplay was both fun and fair – exactly the right ingredients needed to produce a game that would be played for years.

"Sod football, two-player on this was awesome"
Mr Majestyk







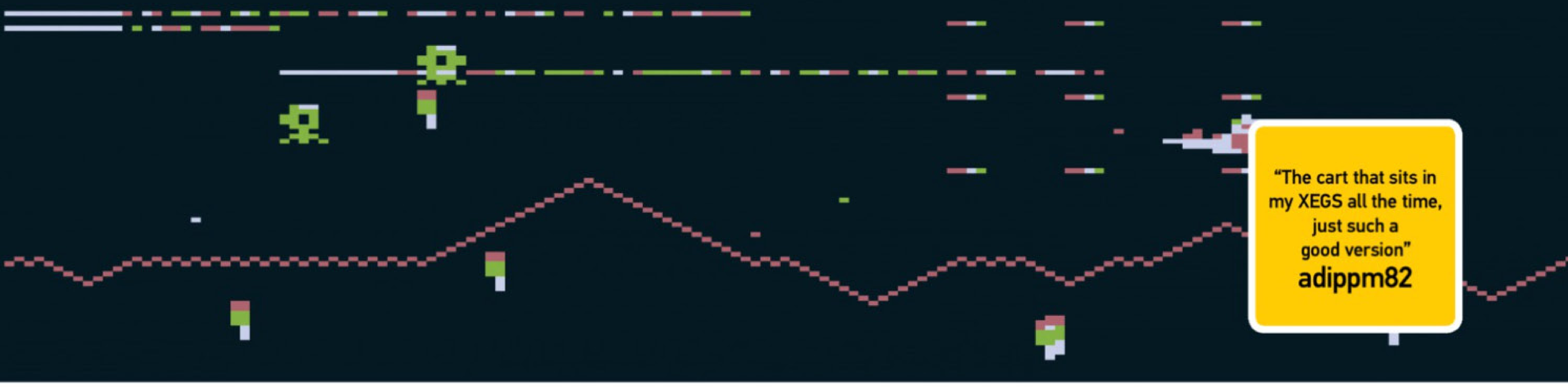
Defender

DEVELOPER: ATARI
YEAR: 1982 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

10 ***Defender* is a** hardcore game – that's an unquestionable truth. Enemy attacks are ferocious, everything happens at lightning speed and as a result the difficulty is very high. If you want to get good at *Defender*, you'll need to practice. That ruthless challenge is part of why *Defender* has done down in history as an important, influential game, and the Atari 8-bit version brilliantly captures the look and feel of the original arcade release. The challenge is there, the ship's handling is just right, and the pixel-shattering explosions are present and correct. If you're looking for inaccuracies they're certainly present, but the game rates as an excellent blaster all the same. However, that's not the whole story about this arcade conversion.

You see, there's something odd about *Defender* for the Atari 8-bit machines – two versions of it exist. The version of it that was commercially released is Steve A Baker's version, and that's the one you'll see on these pages. However, another version was being developed on Atari's behalf by Michael W Colburn. The circumstances behind this situation are unknown, but the differences are clear to see. The released version accepts screen flicker and less fine scrolling as prices to pay for an appearance that resembles that of the arcade game, whereas the unreleased version features a lower level of detail in order to maintain smooth scrolling. It's fair to say that both versions would have been considered good releases in 1982. The trade-off between detail and speed is one that's common in 8-bit gaming, but it's rare that we get to look at two versions of the same game that choose to resolve the situation in opposite ways.

All that having been said, it's clear that there's a lot of love for the finished, released version and we can see why. We know it takes a great approach to bringing Eugene Jarvis's classic home – we've seen the alternative.



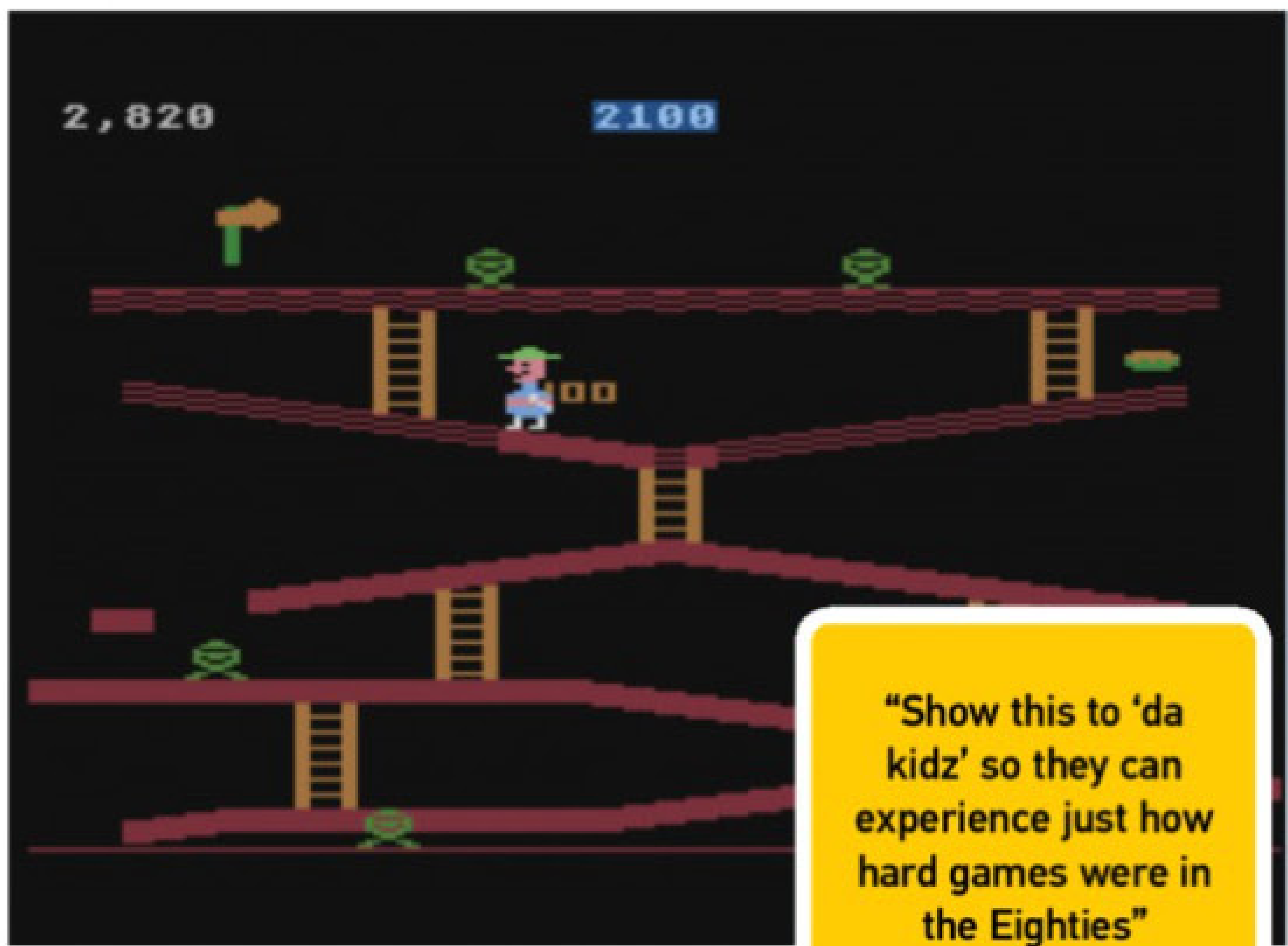
"The cart that sits in my XEGS all the time, just such a good version"
adippm82

Zybex

DEVELOPER: ZEPPELIN GAMES
YEAR: 1988 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

9 ***Draconus* wasn't the** only one of Zeppelin's budget Atari releases to make an impact, as this shoot-'em-up manages to crack the top ten. *Zybex* is well known for its impressive presentation, with high-quality visuals and sound, but as always gameplay is king and the game doesn't disappoint here. The alien onslaught is relentless from the start and you'll regularly feel under-armed, but if you pick your shots and start to accumulate power-ups, you'll quickly begin to make progress through the game's numerous stages. The game doesn't strip you of all your power-ups upon death, instead removing one level from your equipped weapon – an excellently fair approach that avoids causing frustration. It's a hard game, but one which rewards players that persevere with hours of gameplay.





"Show this to 'da kidz' so they can experience just how hard games were in the Eighties"
moora

Miner 2049er

DEVELOPER: BILL HOGUE
YEAR: 1982 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

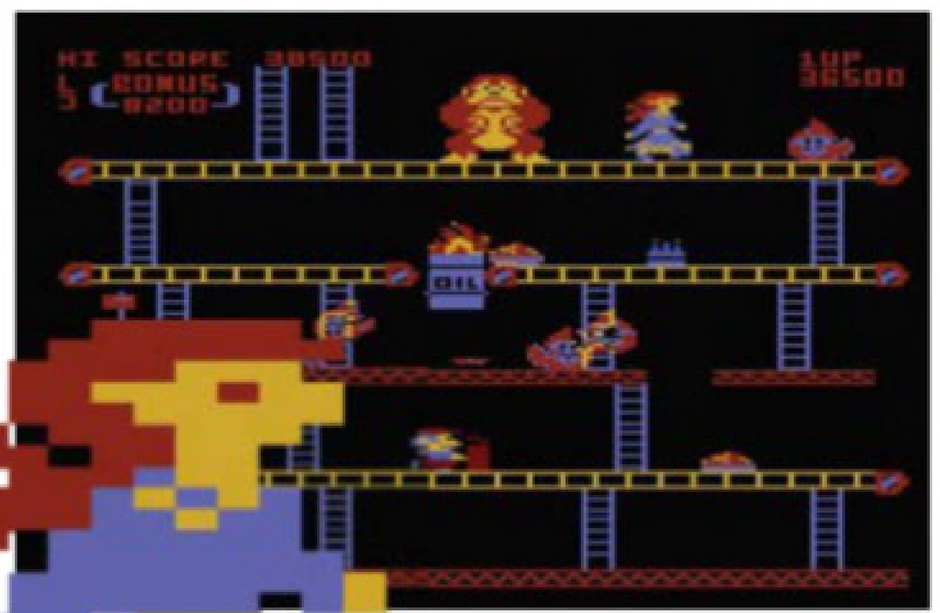
8 **It wasn't hard** to excuse a lack of content in the early days of gaming – limited storage capacity kept games simple. However *Miner 2049er* didn't provide excuses and when the game reached Atari owners, it was a revelation. Bounty Bob's single-screen platforming exploits took place across ten different stages, which was a huge number in comparison to most games at the time.

Stages contained all manner of hazards for Bounty Bob to contend with, including radioactive mutants, slides and transporters. The result was a platformer that was challenging but ultimately a great deal of fun. Better yet, *Miner 2049er* was an inspiration to other programmers, with the likes of *Manic Miner* and *Crystal Caves* directly inspired by it.

Donkey Kong

DEVELOPER: ATARI
YEAR: 1983 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

7 **The ColecoVision version** of *Donkey Kong* is rightly remembered for being a high-quality release, but we're not sure that it's the best of the contemporary conversions – and it's the Atari 8-bit version that causes those doubts. While it's slightly less pretty than its console competitor, Atari's version includes all four of the arcade stages, with the oft-omitted factory stage making a rare appearance. But that isn't the only thing the Atari version does well, as the game boasts some excellent sound and some of the added presentation that brought the conversion closer to the arcade original. This was an era in which an age of arcade-perfect conversions on home machines was a far-off dream, but the Atari 8-bit version of *Donkey Kong* made it feel a lot closer than it actually was.



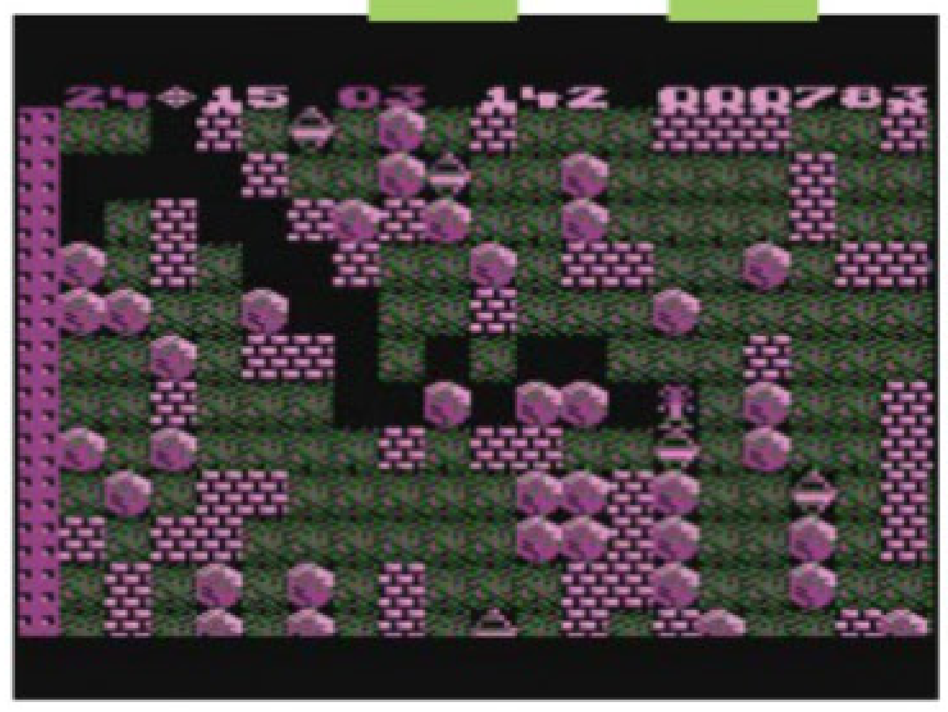




"Arguably the best *Defender*-type game on any system. The game the hardware was built to play!"
Sargie



Boulder Dash



■ **DEVELOPER:** PETER LIEPA/CHRIS GRAY
■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION

5 ***Boulder Dash* has** been widely converted and received numerous sequels, but Rockford's adventures began on the Atari 8-bit machines. The key to the game's appeal was the balance of trying to escape the cave with as many diamonds as you could within the time limit, while trying to avoid the boulders that tumbled downwards as they were disturbed by your activity. While the visuals were pretty plain, the music was rather excellent. As well as being widely converted amongst the home computers and consoles of the time, is notable as one of the earliest games to make the rare jump from home to arcade.

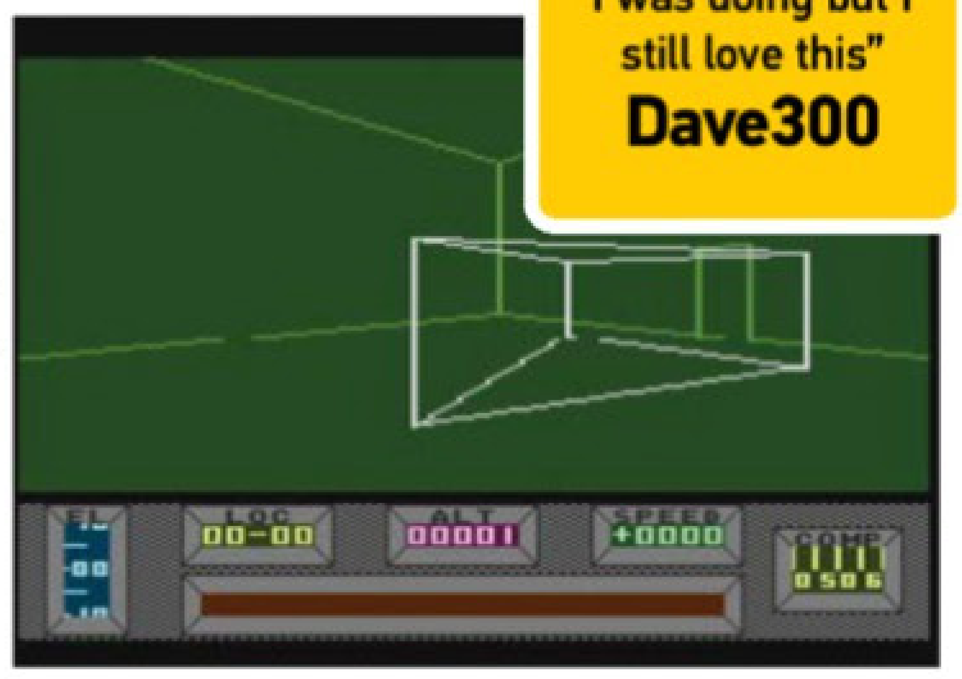
Dropzone

■ **DEVELOPER:** ARCHER MACLEAN
■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

6 **Archer MacLean was** a fan of the Atari 8-bit from the first time he saw it, and chose to make his debut on the system. *Dropzone* has a very similar structure to that of the arcade classic *Defender*, including the scrolling playfield, relentless enemy attacks and the need to protect civilians, although they now needed picking up and ferrying back to the *Dropzone*.

However, what set the game apart from the competition was its amazing technical prowess – it was incredibly fast and looked fantastic, with impressive explosions upon death. The game serves as a great demonstration of the power of Atari's hardware too, as even Archer's Commodore 64 version didn't quite measure up.

Mercenary: Escape From Targ



"I had no idea what I was doing but I still love this"
Dave300

■ **DEVELOPER:** PAUL WOAKES
■ **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** OPEN-WORLD ADVENTURE

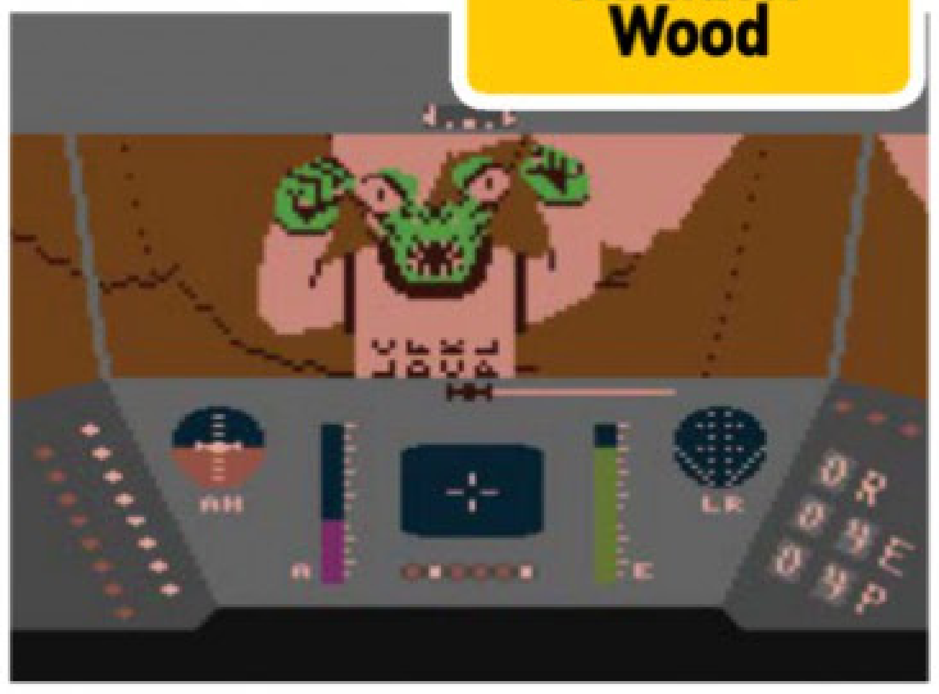
4 **An open-world game** in which there's no traditional Game Over sequence? That's common in today's market, but *Mercenary* was a wholly uncommon type of game in the mid-Eighties. The game allowed you to freely explore the landscape of Targ on foot or by vehicle, as well as allowing you to take on jobs. You could engage in combat with enemy craft, or simply fly around blowing up the game's various buildings. It was an unusual degree of freedom to have – so much so that publisher Novagen later released a 'survival kit' featuring maps and vehicle data.

Rescue On Fractalus!

■ **DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** FLIGHT SIMULATOR

3 **Boasting some impressive** visuals, *Rescue On Fractalus!* is memorable for reasons that go far beyond its technical achievements. The game sees you flying across the fractal landscapes of Fractalus, searching for downed Ethercorps pilots and shooting down hostile Jaggi aliens. The 3D aerial combat is impressive, but the real thrill is the tension of landing to pick up a downed pilot as you never know if you're about to meet friend or foe. The latter is one of gaming's first true scares, as the alien pops up and tries to break through your windscreen!

"Who didn't jump the first time an alien hit their windscreen?"
Radiator Wood



MULE

■ **DEVELOPER:** OZARK SOFTSCAPE ■ **YEAR:** 1983 ■ **GENRE:** STRATEGY

2 **For a game** that was cited as an influence by the likes of Shigeru Miyamoto, *MULE* was not a particularly big commercial hit. That could be because its overall premise is decidedly odd and not something you'd expect from a computer game. Players take part in the colonisation of a distant planet, aided by MULEs – equine robots which can be outfitted with land-enhancing developments.

Despite relatively low sales, *MULE* earns its high placing as a multiplayer classic – with support for up to four players, it's easy to get people involved in the business of colonisation. Amassing the greatest wealth amongst the colonists was your goal, but you'd need to cooperate with them in order to achieve it – if players were too hostile to one another, the colonisation effort would fail as players ran out of food and energy. With random events including space pirate attacks, the game was always close as disaster could strike the leader at any time.



Star Raiders

■ **DEVELOPER:** ATARI ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1979 ■ **GENRE:** SPACE SIMULATOR

1

Almost every piece of gaming hardware, no matter how many or how few units it sold, has a killer app – the game that would make the hardware worth owning, even if nothing else was produced for it. Some systems have to wait for theirs, such as the Mega Drive and the GameCube, but others are lucky enough to get them on launch. The Atari 8-bit family falls into the latter category. When the Atari 400 and 800 arrived in 1979, *Star Raiders* arrived with them and instantly put the hardware on the map.

Star Raiders puts you in control of a spacecraft in the Atarian Starship Fleet, tasked with the destruction of the Zylon forces. The Zylons will attempt to destroy Atarian space stations, so the best course of action is to look at the map, set coordinates and engage hyperthrust to intercept them. One shot from a Zylon craft is sufficient to destroy an unshielded Atarian fighter, and even the shields can only prevent so much – your craft will sustain damage to individual parts before failing completely. It's a dangerous engagement, but a thrilling one thanks to the first-person view that lets you see photon blasts narrowly whizz by your craft.

Space combat games had existed prior to *Star Raiders* of course, but what *Star Raiders* represented was nothing less than a major generational shift. Prior to the launch of its 8-bit computers, Atari had always been constrained in some way – arcade machines could handle technically demanding designs but had to be simple enough for audiences to grasp, while the 2600 was an extremely limited machine. Free of these limitations, Atari was free to design a much more complex game, utilising the keyboard for additional controls that couldn't be managed with the one-button joystick. The complexity added a level of depth that was unmatched by its contemporaries – nothing like *Star Raiders* had ever been seen in the home before.

As a result, *Star Raiders* had a major impact. When Archer MacLean saw it at a computer show, he was mystified by its technical achievements and chose to buy an Atari 800 based on what he'd seen, eventually coding *Dropzone* as a result. It shaped the further development of its own genre, too – when David Braben and Ian Bell met and discovered that they were working on similar projects, *Star Raiders* was the game that convinced them to write *Elite*. Major titles such as *Wing Commander*, *Freelancer* and *EVE Online* can all trace their lineage back to *Star Raiders* in some way.

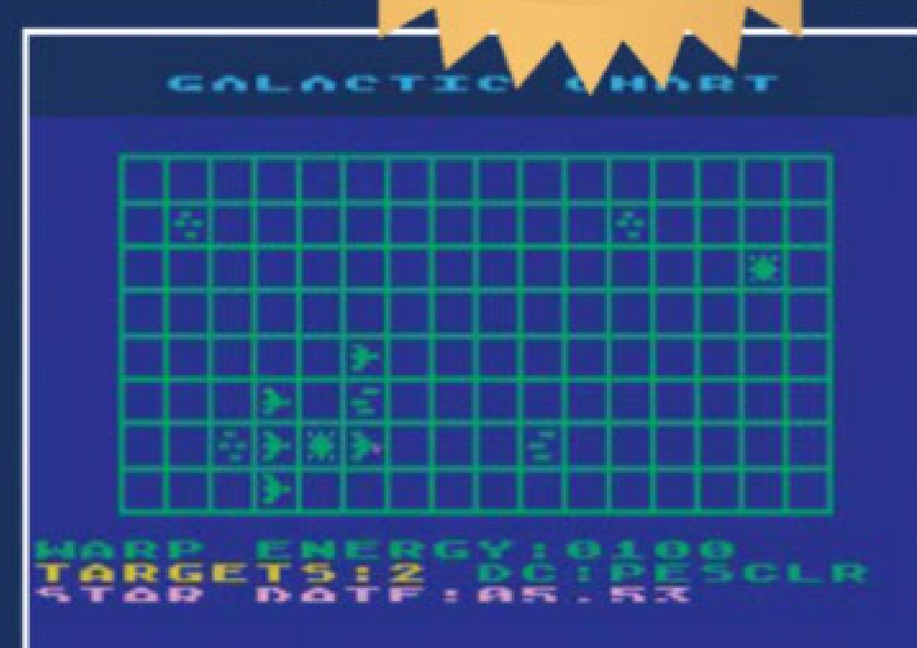
Star Raiders sold computers, it inspired legendary coders and it shaped a genre. However all of that is secondary to the fact that decades on, it's still fun – and that's why it's your number one Atari 8-bit game.

Five reasons why it's great

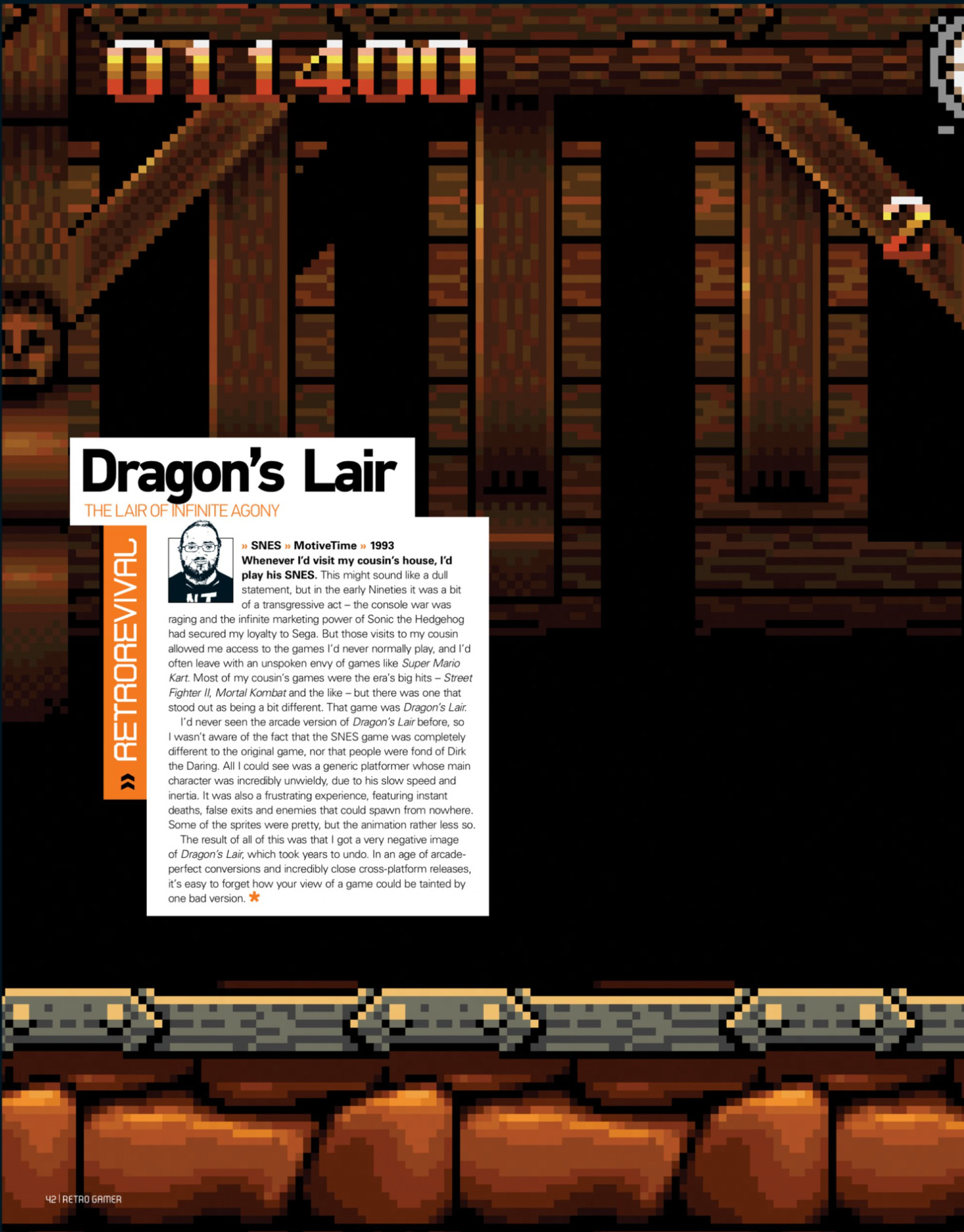
- *Star Raiders* demonstrates the jump-in power between the Atari 2600 and the 8-bit family.
- The 3D space combat is the best of its era – the action is fast and intuitive, allowing anyone to dive in.
- Everything takes place in real time, even when you're viewing the map – there's no refuge from attack.
- Thanks to its efficient 8Kb size, it runs on every single machine in the Atari 8-bit family.
- *Star Raiders* is a hugely influential title, most notably providing a key source of inspiration for *Elite*.











» RETROREVIVAL

Dragon's Lair

THE LAIR OF INFINITE AGONY


» SNES » MotiveTime » 1993

Whenever I'd visit my cousin's house, I'd play his SNES. This might sound like a dull statement, but in the early Nineties it was a bit of a transgressive act – the console war was raging and the infinite marketing power of Sonic the Hedgehog had secured my loyalty to Sega. But those visits to my cousin allowed me access to the games I'd never normally play, and I'd often leave with an unspoken envy of games like *Super Mario Kart*. Most of my cousin's games were the era's big hits – *Street Fighter II*, *Mortal Kombat* and the like – but there was one that stood out as being a bit different. That game was *Dragon's Lair*.

I'd never seen the arcade version of *Dragon's Lair* before, so I wasn't aware of the fact that the SNES game was completely different to the original game, nor that people were fond of Dirk the Daring. All I could see was a generic platformer whose main character was incredibly unwieldy, due to his slow speed and inertia. It was also a frustrating experience, featuring instant deaths, false exits and enemies that could spawn from nowhere. Some of the sprites were pretty, but the animation rather less so.

The result of all of this was that I got a very negative image of *Dragon's Lair*, which took years to undo. In an age of arcade-perfect conversions and incredibly close cross-platform releases, it's easy to forget how your view of a game could be tainted by one bad version. *





ULTIMATE GUIDE

SHINOBI

Shinobi comes from the Japanese word 'shinobu', meaning 'to hide'. But, there was no hiding how good Sega's arcade hit was, as Andrew Fisher explains

In the Eighties, martial arts movies were big. Ninjas were flinging shuriken in games including *The Last Ninja, Ninja Gaiden* and *Shadow Warriors* – but the correct term would be shinobi (meaning to steal away) after the mercenaries skilled in covert work that first appeared during the Sengoku period (15th-17th Century) of Japan's troubled history. The star-shaped weapons should really be called shaken, shuriken being a generic term for a thrown weapon. And contrary to the popular image of black robes concealing the face, shinobi would have dressed in civilian clothes as a disguise with their leggings tucked in or tied up to help them move quietly.

Enter Joe Mushashi, dressed in olive green and with his leggings tied up. His basic attack is to throw shaken, but should enemies get close he can perform kicks to defend himself. He is a member of the Oboro clan, which has suffered a major catastrophe. Members of the clan have been kidnapped by the Zeed terrorist organisation and Joe sets out to rescue them in five different missions. Each mission has either three or four stages, the last stage being a boss fight. A number of hostages can be found on every stage except the boss stages, guarded by swordsmen. Rescuing the hostage awards bonus points or a power-up – the basic shaken attack is upgraded to powerful bullets, and Joe gains a sword for close-range attacks. Once all the hostages have been rescued, Joe can proceed to the next stage before his time runs out.

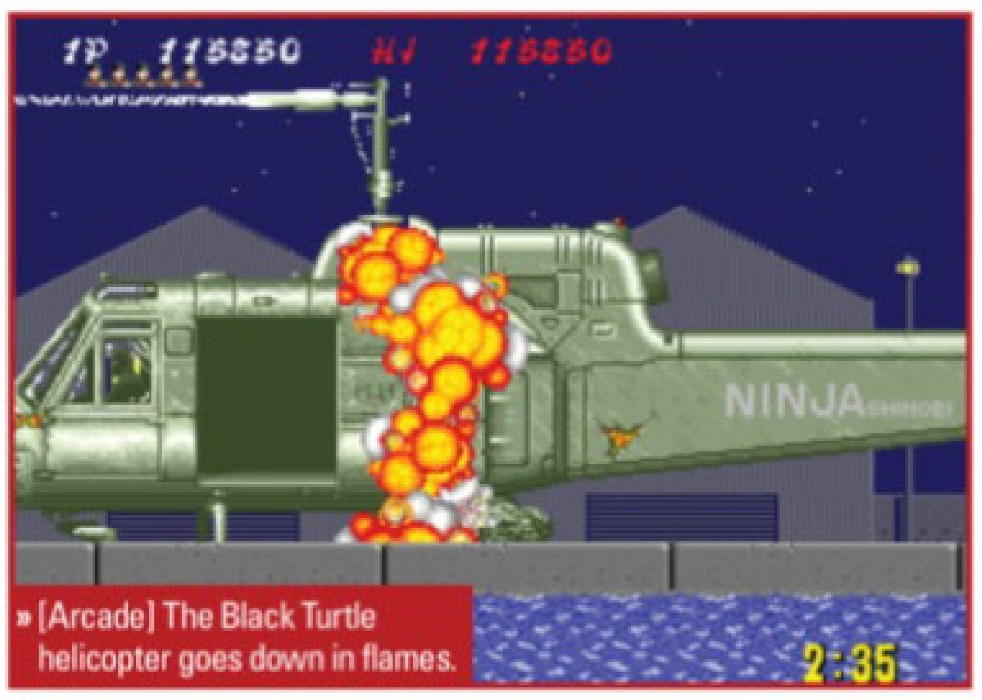
"It is the combination of devious enemy patterns and varied backgrounds that make Shinobi such fun to play"

There is another weapon Joe can use – ninja magic. Once per stage Joe can unleash a powerful attack – bursts of lightning, a whirlwind or multiple copies of himself (depending on the icon shown). These damage every enemy on-screen or cause multiple hits on the bosses. The skilled player can attempt to get through a stage without using the magic to earn a 5,000-point bonus, or try to get through a level using only close attacks (no easy task) for a bigger score boost. Another interesting mechanic is the way that touching most enemies does not kill Joe, only their ▶

PIXEL PERFECT

Just some of the many deadly adversaries you'll face in Shinobi





» [Arcade] The Black Turtle helicopter goes down in flames.



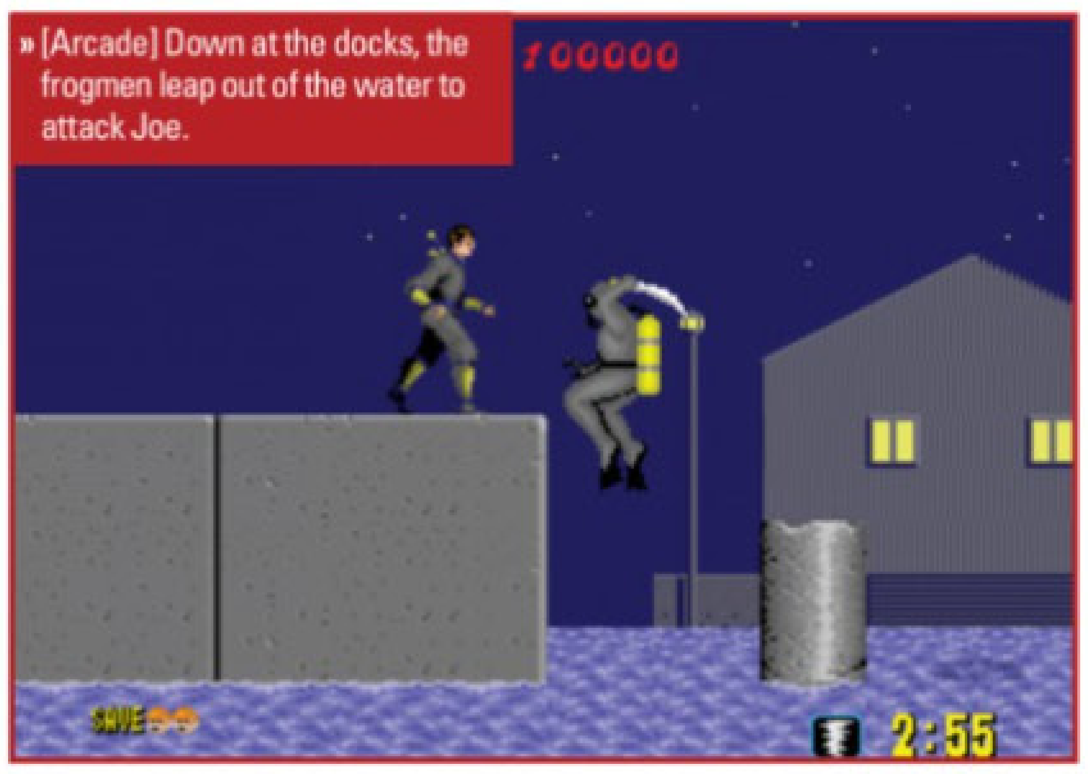
» [Arcade] Between stages these file pages show a map and the mission boss.



» [Arcade] Flying blue ninjas bounce around the bamboo forest of stage 5-1.



» [Arcade] The Masked Ninja's first form uses his lightning magic.



» [Arcade] Down at the docks, the frogmen leap out of the water to attack Joe.



» [Arcade] The Warhol-style images of Marilyn Monroe were removed in recent emulated versions.

weapons or attacks. Get too close and Joe will bounce away, which can be both a hindrance and a way to avoid dying.

The five missions tell a story with changing scenery. Mission 1, 'Pursue The Terrorists', is set in a city and waiting at the end is the giant Ken Oh. Mission 2, 'Enter The Enemy's Hide-Out' takes Joe through the docks and a warehouse, ending with a fight against a helicopter (Black Turtle). Mission 3, 'Attack The Logistic Base', sees Joe fight through the mountains and deep into a cave filled with pipes before taking on the super-computer Mandara guarded by a wall of statues. Mission 4, 'Destroy The Enemy Ninja Group', has Joe infiltrate the training camp and dojo filled with ninjas before taking on the red samurai known as Lobster. Mission 5 is to 'Defeat the Behind-The-Scene Ninja', the Masked Ninja hiding in his mansion. Completing this final mission is made more difficult since the player cannot continue when their lives run out. Vanquishing the final boss starts the end sequence, a short vertically-scrolling message describing the motivation of Nakahara (the Masked Ninja).

There is one obvious influence on the gameplay of *Shinobi* – Namco's 1986 hit *Rolling Thunder*. This introduced the idea of split-level platforms the player could jump between. *Shinobi* takes this idea further, with sections of its stages featuring railings to add depth. And in later stages, the more aggressive ninja and other types of enemy will actively pursue Joe as he jumps between platform levels. The levels change nature too, from a straightforward horizontal layout to the more complex warehouse and pipe-filled cave stages that scroll vertically. It is the combination of devious enemy patterns and varied backgrounds that make it such fun to play through and learn how to beat *Shinobi*.

> **"The skilled player can attempt to get through a stage without using the magic to earn a 5,000-point bonus"**

Introduced in 1985, Sega's System 16 board was powered by two different processors – the Motorola 68000 (as seen in the Amiga and Atari ST) and the Zilog Z80 (at the heart of many home computers, including the ZX Spectrum). This combination was also at the heart of the Mega Drive/Genesis. Among the hit games powered by System 16 were *Fantasy Zone*, *Golden Axe*, *Altered Beast* and *Dynamite Dux*. Before the JAMMA standard, *Shinobi*'s cabinet had three action buttons – used for attack, jump and magic. Designer Yutaka Sugano had joined Sega in 1986 and started work on what would ▶

COIN-OP CONVERSIONS
Your guide to the best and worst ports...



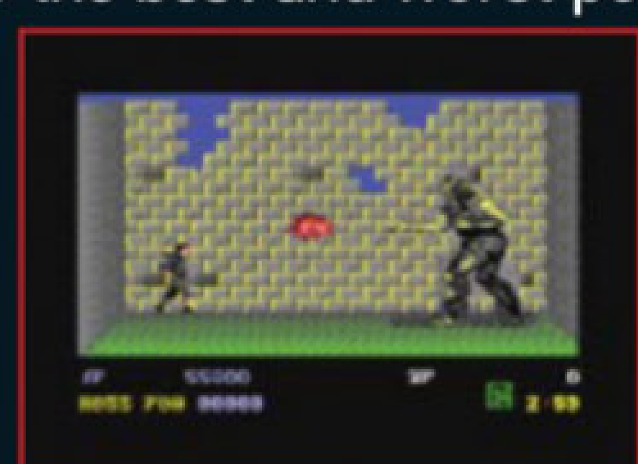
Amiga
The Amiga version gets a lot right, with accurate level layouts, good backgrounds and all the presentation between levels. What lets it down is the dark colour palette and the very small-scale bosses – a disappointment from a machine that can handle large graphics.



Amstrad
The garish Amstrad graphics do not do justice to the original, and the height of platforms makes it hard to see enemies above or below the player. It does have some speech and good presentation, including a well-drawn loading screen, but runs slower than the Spectrum version.



Atari ST
The Atari ST conversion suffers from decidedly murky colours just like the Amiga, and the scrolling is sadly not as smooth. Both 16-bit versions are well presented, including the file pages, but this is at the cost of longer loading times that slow play down considerably.



Commodore 64
Simon Pick's conversion earned a deserved *C&VG* Hit. Graphics do an excellent job of emulating the original, level maps are accurate and it is well presented throughout. It is missing a couple of enemy types and the file pages, but sensibly loads a complete mission at a time.



Master System
Sega's own hardware does an excellent job, with minor changes – an energy bar (touching an enemy loses health) and making players earn the bonus stage by saving hostages. There are more types of power-up and it is not necessary to save every hostage.

BOSS RUSH

It's time to take on the bosses that make up Zeed's Ring of Five



FILE 4162 – KEN OH



Looking a lot like Shredder, the adversary of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Ken Oh pops into view at the end of the first two sections of Mission 1 and has a sneaky potshot at the player. Reaching his lair, he towers over Joe and unleashes twin fireballs that bounce in tricky patterns.

How to beat him

Jump or duck under the fireballs, then jump to shoot him in the face repeatedly until he lies down and sees the error of his ways. A good tactic is to fire on the line of bricks level with his eye.



3 Difficulty Level

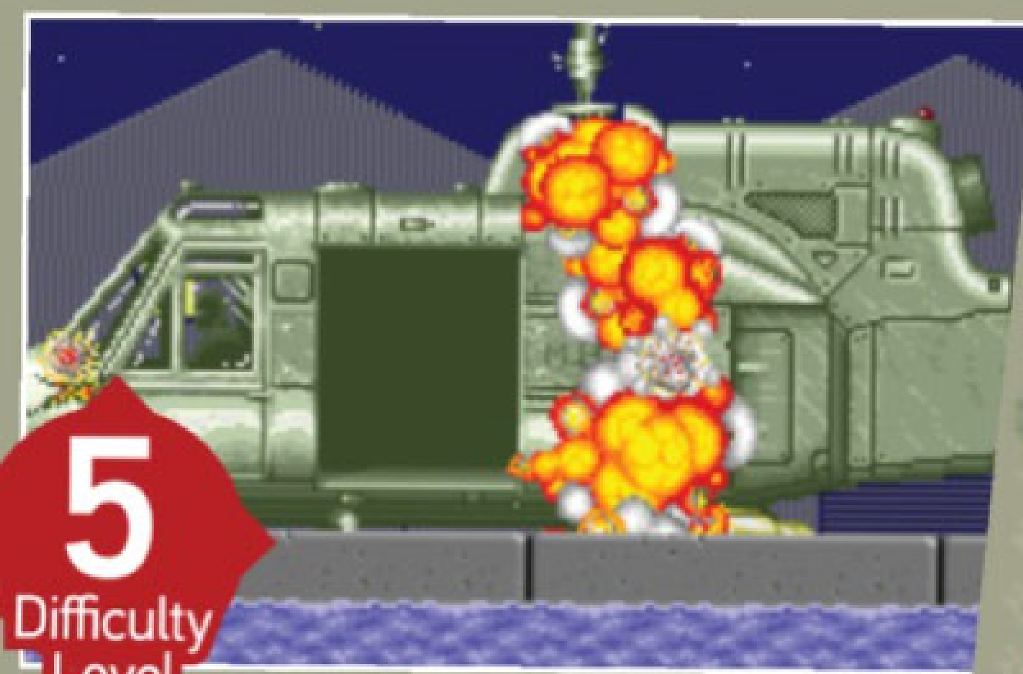
FILE 4529 – BLACK TURTLE



Man versus machine in the dockyard – is it fair to fight against a helicopter? Yellow ninjas leap from the belly of the helicopter to pursue Joe on the ground, while the helicopter unleashes missiles that shoot along at ground level. It's the first of many vehicles that would be used as adversaries as the series progressed.

How to beat him

The only vulnerable part of Black Turtle is the glass dome low down at the front. Jump to hit it, and if there are too many missiles and ninja attacking it's worth unleashing magic to survive. It's only a few hits before the helicopter goes down in flames.



5 Difficulty Level

FILE 4463 – MANDARA



You may need to pray to a higher power as you face this tough two-part enemy. First comes the large wall of golden statues, advancing towards you and pushing you back towards the sizzling electric barrier. Defeat them and you face the giant mechanical head shooting small fireballs as it moves up and down.

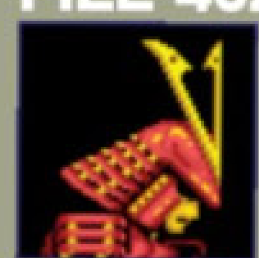
How to beat him

Jump up and down to hit the two nearest statues alternately, gradually wearing down the wall. Shoot the head once in the red jewel to start it moving, then target that weak spot again to take it down.



6 Difficulty Level

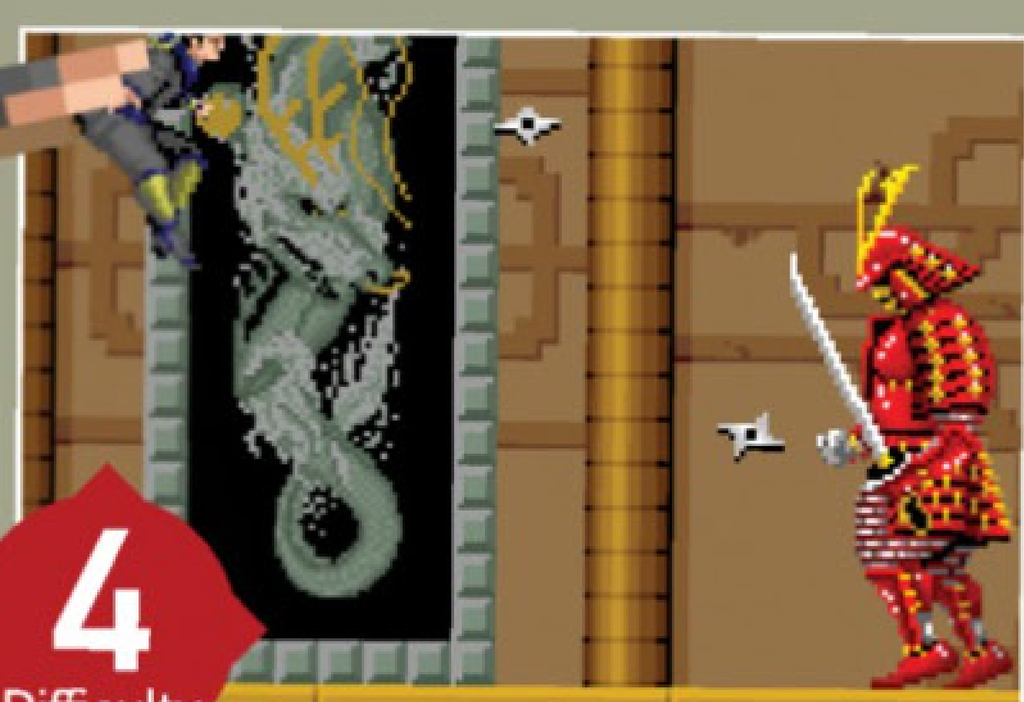
FILE 4629 – LOBSTER



Another tall boss, this time in full samurai armour and swinging an impressive sword. Lobster will walk towards you and then go for the kill when you are in range. He can move quite quickly for a heavily-suited samurai, so plan your attacks carefully.

How to beat him

Hit and run tactics work best here, as you wait for Lobster to swing and then jump over his sword to shoot him in the face and chest. Back away and repeat. He's relatively easy once you know what you're doing.



4 Difficulty Level

FILE 4663 – MASKED NINJA



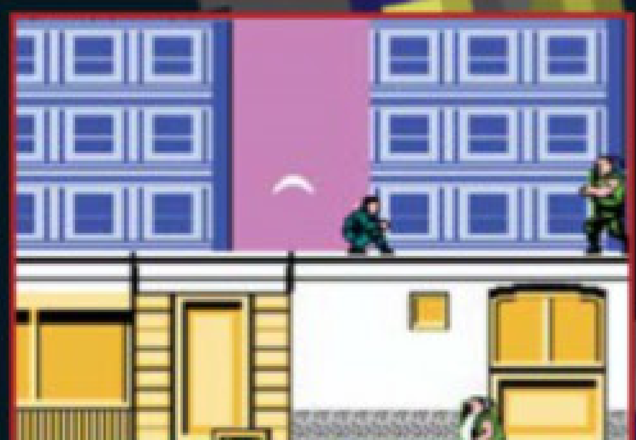
This is the trickiest fight of all. The Masked Ninja unleashes his own magic to split into four different forms. The first uses lightning bursts, the second is a moving whirlwind chucking out razor-sharp discs and the third creates multiple copies. The final form is the only one that can take real damage. Kill him to win the game.

How to beat him

You will be doing a lot of crouching and kicking/firing to finish off the first three forms, then running away to avoid the lunging attacks of the final form. Keep your distance and use magic when he is in range.



9 Difficulty Level



NES

Tengen produced a disappointing NES version, based on the Master System version. Only released in North America without Nintendo's approval, the graphics, music and stages do not capture the original appeal despite the NES's strength in the platform genre.



PC-DOS

In glorious four-colour or 16-colour, the PC DOS version developed by Micromosaics Inc ranks poorly. Jerky scrolling (a severe problem for many PC games until the likes of *Jazz Jackrabbit* and *Commander Keen*) and poor graphics are joined by very basic presentation and sound.



PC Engine

This looks very impressive, with perhaps the closest graphics to the original of any conversion. Asmik removed the bonus stage and the time limit, there are no close-range attacks and Mission 2 is missing completely – but it plays smoothly and feels close to the arcade.



ZX Spectrum

Smooth scrolling, detailed graphics, accurate maps and a good pace are the best features of the Spectrum conversion. One drawback is the separate 'big jump' key for changing platform level and the tricky method of redefining the controls – but it is a fine effort on the hardware available.



Xbox 360/Wii

You'd expect these versions of *Shinobi* to be arcade perfect. Except they're not… Licensing issues meant that aesthetic changes exist on some of the levels. The Marilyn Monroe pictures are nowhere to be seen, while the Spider-Man-inspired ninja is now dressed in green and yellow.



SIMON PICK INTERVIEW

Simon worked his coding magic on the impressive C64 conversion

Did you have access to the arcade machine?
We had two, one in the office and one in my living room. I was very popular all of a sudden! My friends would come over and spend the whole night trying to finish it… I was sick to death of it, having spent all day playing and coding it! Sega provided bit-maps for the sprites and backgrounds, but that was of little use to us; Ned Langman redrew everything from scratch.

How did you recreate the magic?
The spirally 'smart bomb' effect in the game was tricky as it needed a lot more than eight sprites. I ended up flickering all the sprites between two locations on consecutive frames to give the impression of 16 objects. This made the spiral appear (almost!) transparent and magical, which was a nice side effect!

Any clever technical tricks?
There are places in the game where the main character goes behind parts of the background and in front of others. That was not something you normally see. Ned had to ensure that he used certain colours for foreground objects to guarantee the correct draw order of the background and sprites. As the player moved through the level the code had to modify the foreground/sprite priorities to keep everything looking correct.

I was very pleased with the colour-scroll. At the time most games didn't attempt to scroll the colour map, so games generally had four-colour backgrounds. I'd figured out a way to change just the elements of the screen that had changed colour, and only scroll those – as a result the game has a nice colourful background.

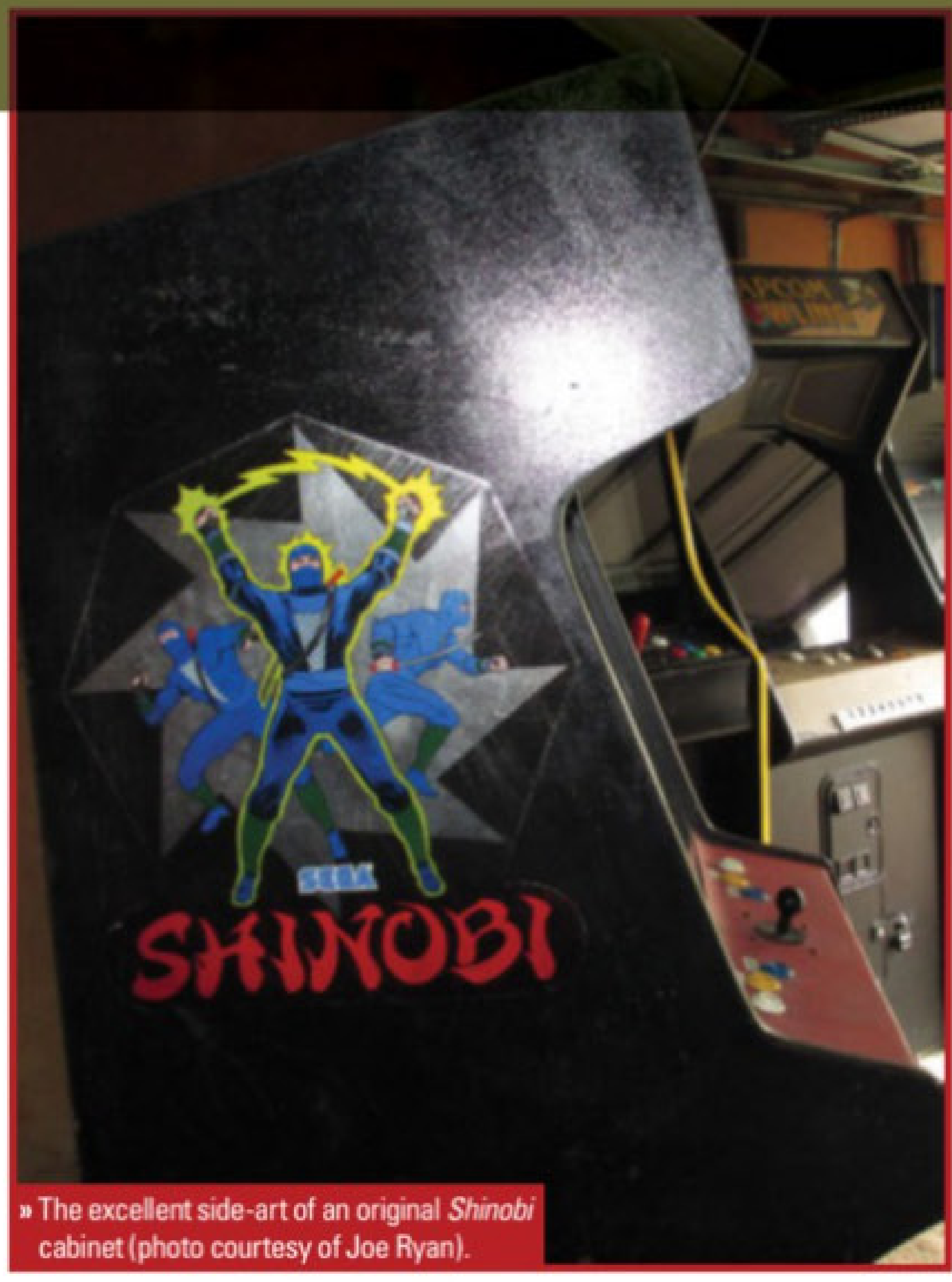
Another cool trick that didn't make it to the final version was allowing the user to play a bonus game while the next level loaded. The tape duplication company kept failing to make cassettes that worked. A week later we found out that they had a dry-joint in their machine. By then it was too late to revert to my fancy loader, so it was lost forever.







» [Arcade] Hanging around in level 1-2, the blue and red wall-crawlers jump down to attack Joe.



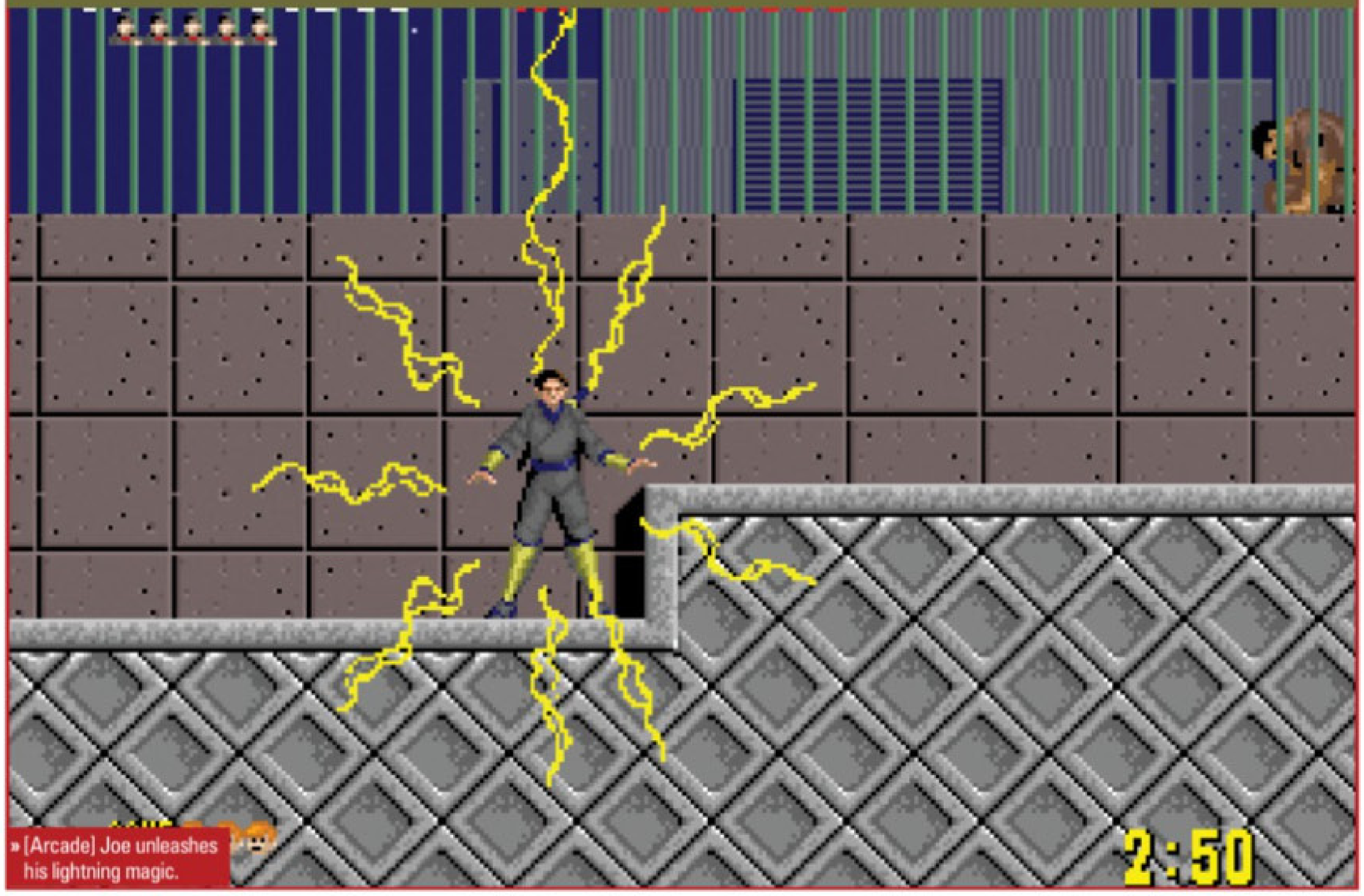
» The excellent side-art of an original *Shinobi* cabinet (photo courtesy of Joe Ryan).

become *Shinobi*; he would later switch to Sega of America where he became famous for his work on *Sonic 2* and *Sonic Spinball*. He left Sega to form Artoon. Composer Yasuhiro Kawakami had just joined Sega and the varied musical style of *Shinobi* was his first work for the company. He would join Square in 1991, collaborating with Ryuji Sasai.

Home computer conversions were published by Virgin Games and developed by The Sales Curve, also responsible for *Silkworm* and *Rodland*. Simon Pick (see interview) was in management there. "The Sales Curve had sub-contracted development to Imagitec Design, who had done a great job of *Gemini Wings*. The C64 programmer they had lined up became suddenly unavailable. After looking for other developers it soon became clear that I was the only viable option," says Simon. *Shinobi* was followed by direct arcade sequel *Shadow Dancer*, with Joe's son dressed in dazzling white robes and accompanied by a white attack dog. *Shinobi* then spawned a series of spin-off games on Sega's home and portable machines. Issue 64 has a guide to the whole series. Two forays into 3D graced the PS2, and most recently a new game inspired by the original appeared on the 3DS. Fans can download an emulated arcade version from Xbox Live Arcade and the Wii's Virtual Console, with minor graphical changes. The blue and red wall-crawlers had their colours changed due to the similarity to Spider-Man, and the Marilyn Monroe posters (seen at the start of Stage 1-2) were removed.

Shinobi has always been seen as an arcade hit, with its legacy being an excellent series of games. It is a tough challenge for players to make it through to the end, and an example of Sega's brilliant designs from the company's heyday. *

> "After looking for other developers for the C64 version it soon became clear that I was the only viable option"
> Simon Pick

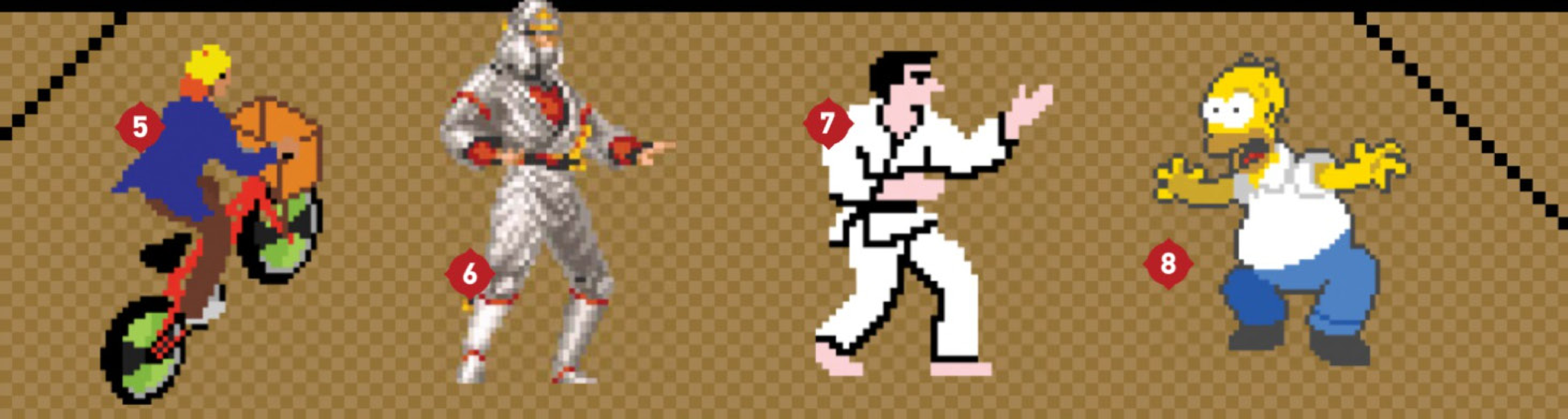


» [Arcade] Joe unleashes his lightning magic.



WELCOME TO BONUS STAGE!

Other arcade bonus rounds that are great fun to play



Galaga

1 A relatively early bonus round called "Challenging Stage" where you must take down waves of erratic enemies as quickly as possible.

Final Fight

2 Everyone likes to take a rest between levels. Haggar and friends like to smash up cars while the helpless owner looks on.

Street Fighter II

3 More bonus round antics. Ken and co smash up cars and barrels while they're not competing to be the World Warrior.

Golden Axe

4 Mischievious pixies steal your hard-earned potions in Sega's classic. Kick them up the arse to retrieve them again and earn even more goodies.

Paper Boy

5 After getting harassed by dogs, radio-controlled cars and thugs, our paper boy loves nothing better than tackling the local BMX course.

Shadow Dancer

6 *Shinobi*'s sequel features another bonus round. This time the buggers drop down from a building, trying to overwhelm you.

Karate Champ

7 Some great bonus rounds here. You can split wood with a single hit, evade flying objects or punch a bull in the face.

The Simpsons

8 A fun diversion with Bart, Lisa, Homer and Marge blowing up balloons as quickly as possible. The winner floats to victory.



Minority Report

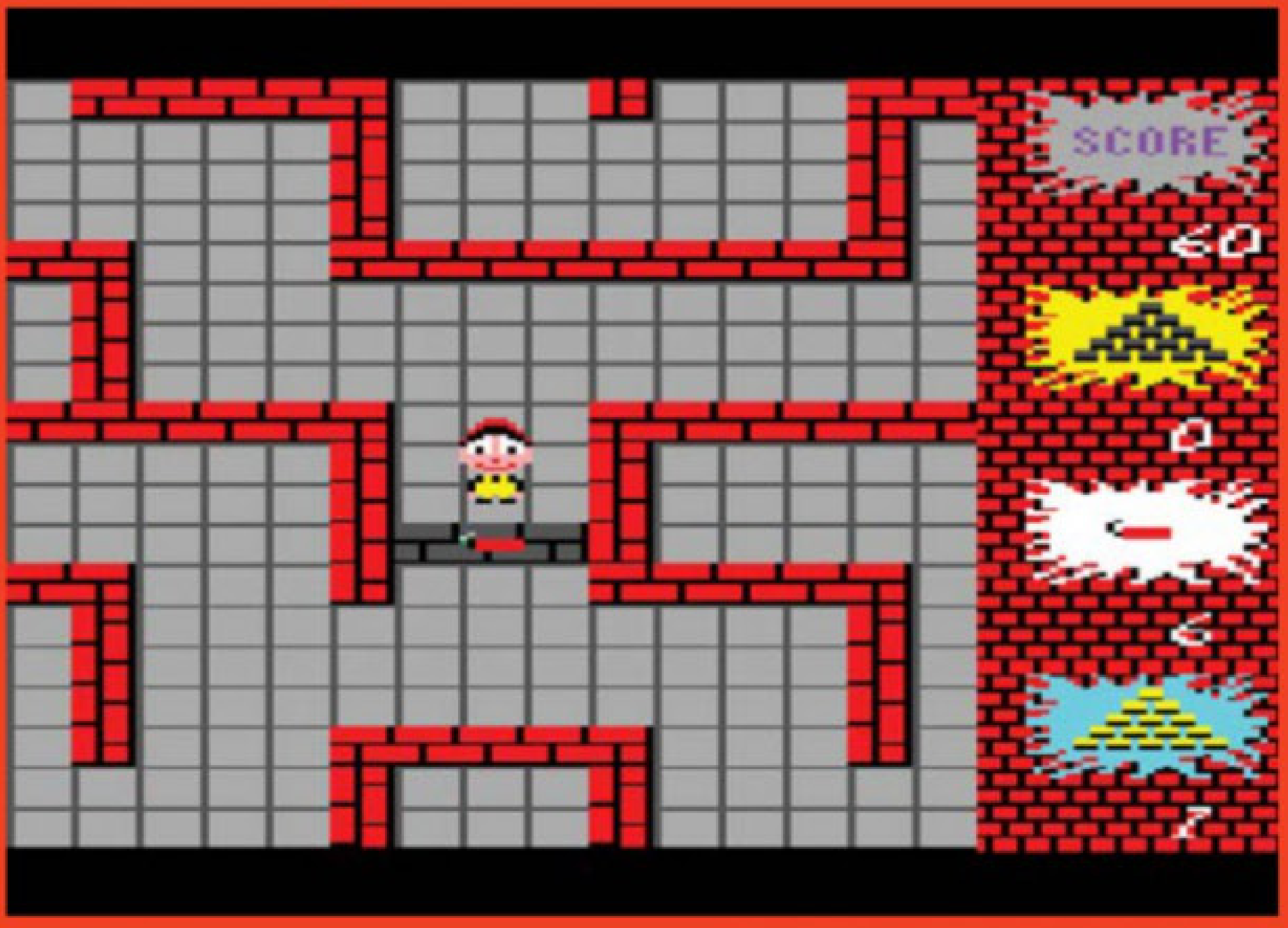


Special TRS-80 Special

Radio Shack's TRS-80 series went through numerous hardware revisions during its late-Seventies to early-Nineties run. Rory Milne looks through the games libraries of the range's different models and highlights some of the line's most interesting titles

A MAZING WORLD OF MALCOLM MORTAR

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER 3
■ DEVELOPER: GREG ZUMWALT / MARK EASTER ■ YEAR: 1987

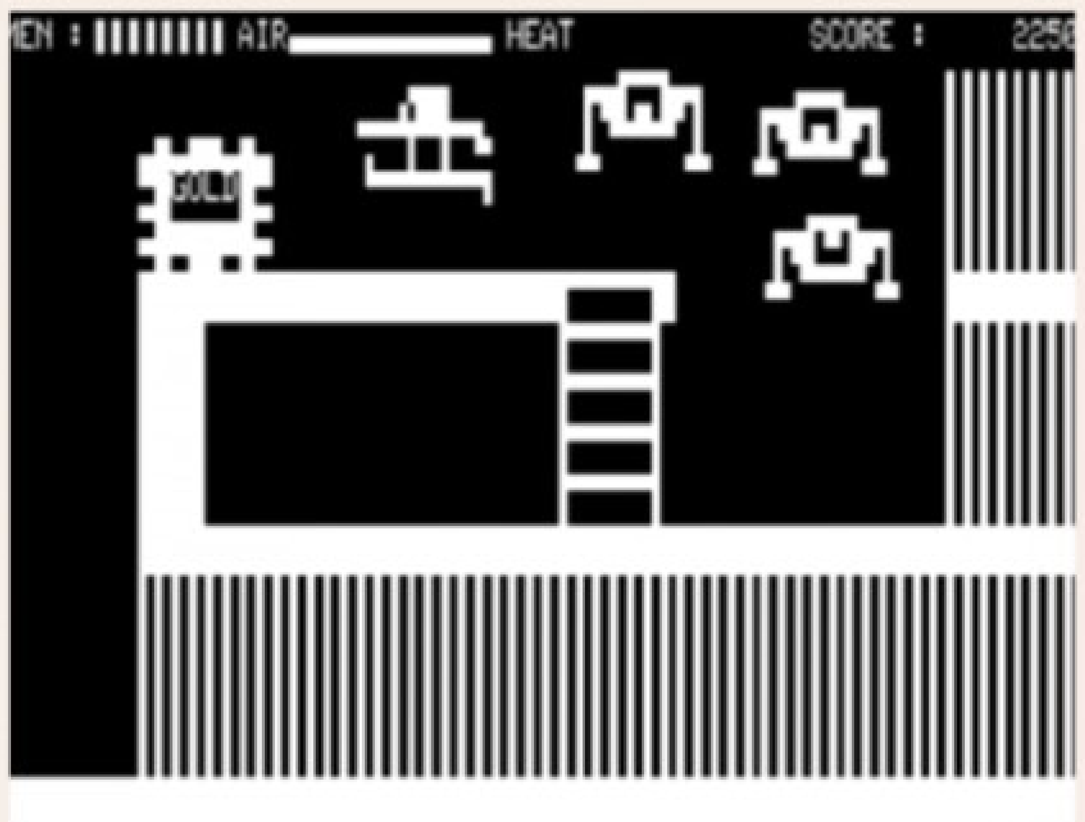


» [Color Computer 3] Explosives in *Malcolm Mortar* are used to blow up walls built in the wrong places.

■ **Greg Zumwalt's TRS-80 output neatly reflects the fashions followed in home computer gaming as a whole during the Eighties.** The games Greg turned out at the start of the decade were clones of popular coin-ops such as *Lunar Lander* and *Defender* and his late-Eighties titles were based on money-spinning licences such as *RoboCop* and *Predator*. Arguably more interesting, though, are the games Greg developed between these two fads when the trend was to produce original and quirky gaming. The culmination of this period saw Greg form a partnership with developer Mark Easter, and in one of their first collaborations the pair created *A Mazing World of Malcolm Mortar*.

At first glance, *Malcolm Mortar*'s component parts seem to suggest an homage to *Bomberman*, but on further inspection it becomes clear that those parts are assembled so differently that the end result is a unique set of mechanics. So while *Malcolm Mortar* is set in a series of top-down mazes featuring brick walls, explosives and scary monsters its gameplay actually differs radically from that of the Hudson Soft classic.

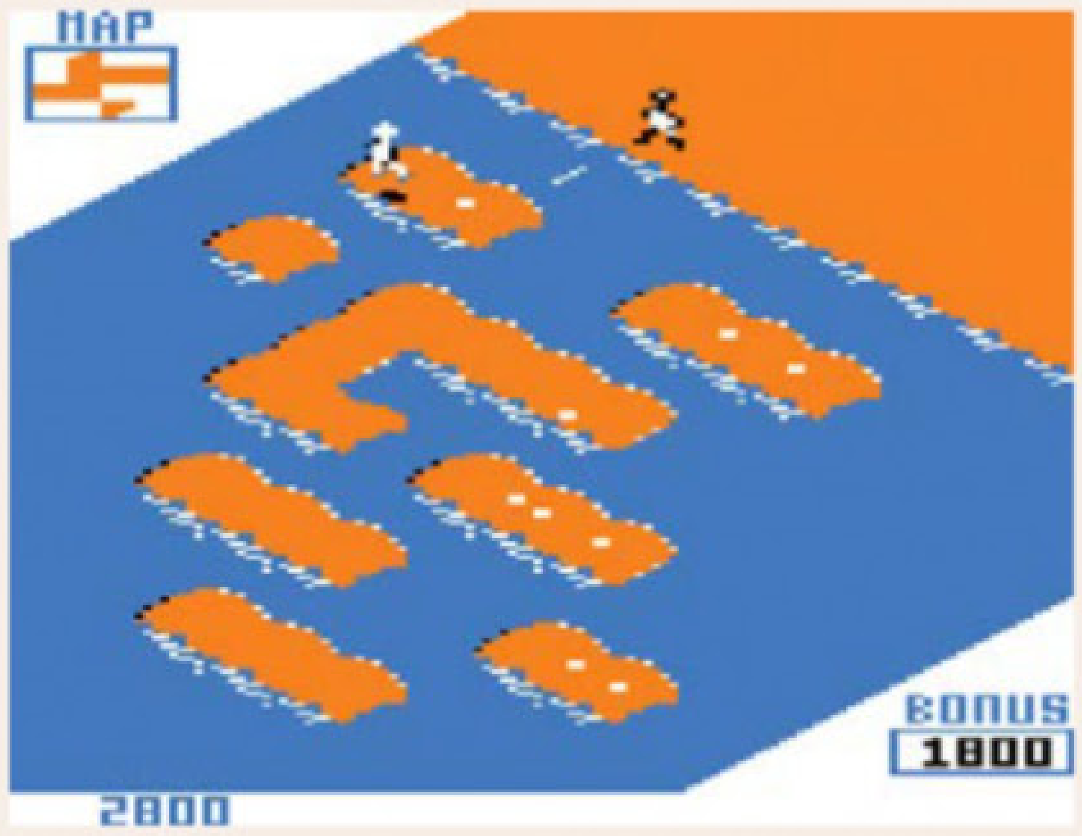
Firstly, the character you play in *Malcolm Mortar* builds brick walls far more often than he blows them up – either to protect himself from his various adversaries or to permanently wall them in. Secondly, explosives are finite – as are bricks – and limited fresh supplies have to be



» VOLCANO HUNTER

■ SYSTEM: TRS-80 ■ DEVELOPER: DAVID SMITH
■ YEAR: 1984

■ **You can't say** *Volcano Hunter*'s developer David Smith doesn't provide fan-service. David sells *Volcano Hunter* t-shirts and even provides 3D printer plans for a keychain version of protagonist Hunting Harry. The continued interest in David's platformer is likely down to this late TRS-80 release offering deeper gameplay than the system's early fare. The goal is to retrieve a city's fuel supplies, which creatures called Druts have stolen. Since contact with Druts is fatal the frequent use of time-bombs is required, but the precarious gaps between this challenging game's platforms prove just as deadly.



» GHANA BWANA

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: STEVE BJORK ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **If *Ghana Bwana*** brings to mind *Zaxxon* then there's a good reason for that – Steve Bjork previously developed the Color Computer version of the classic Sega shooter. The similarities between the two games are superficial, though, with *Ghana Bwana* having a jungle rather than space setting and being more collect-'em-up than shoot-'em-up. Specifically, you have to assemble maps to proceed through the game's six varied stages, which involve navigating shark-infested waters, platforming across swamplands and ascending sheer waterfalls while avoiding boulders.

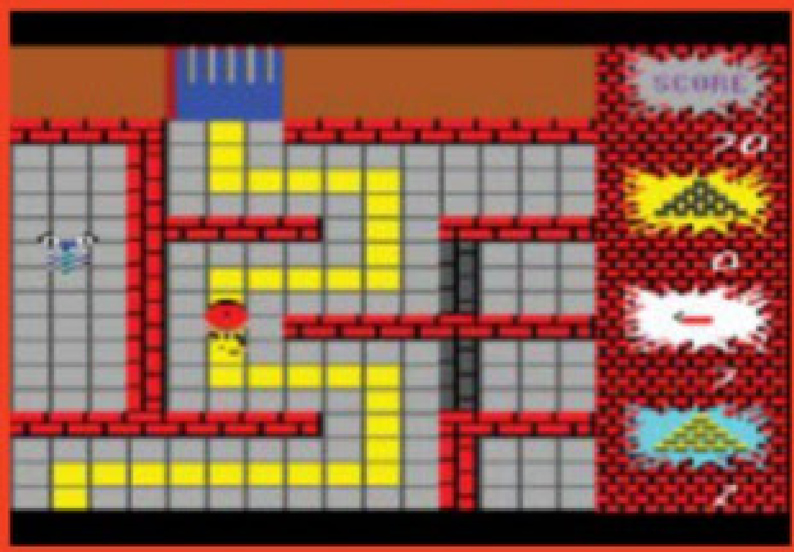


» CAVE WALKER

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: SPECTRAL ASSOCIATES ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **The sequel to** *Downland* – an earlier flick-screen platformer – *Cave Walker* doesn't do anything radically different from its predecessor but is bigger and better. *Cave Walker* is still fairly intuitive, with the puzzles it sets more of a test of reflexes and timing than of lateral thinking. For example, locked doors require keys, energy levels can be raised by collecting bread and opening an umbrella turns a fall into a gentle descent. The hazards found in *Downland* return, with firepits, steam that shoots out of ceilings and a giant white bat all contributing memorable if annoying deaths to the proceedings.

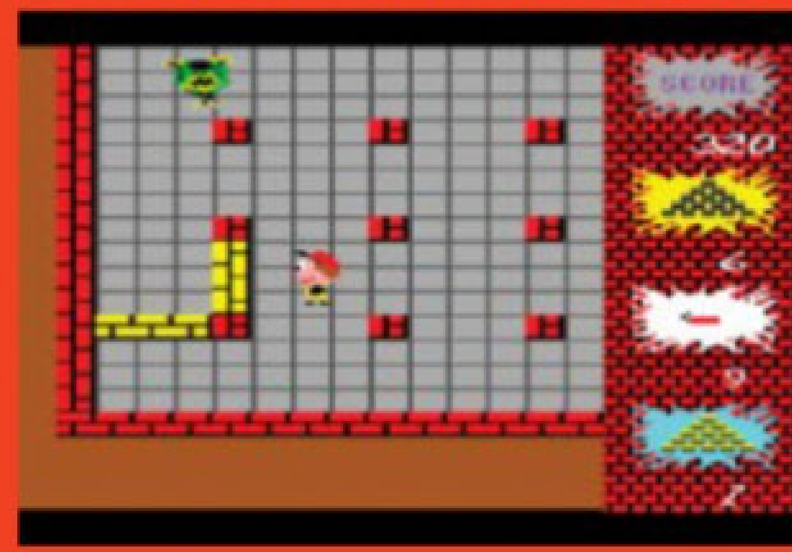
» [Color Computer 3] You have to brick-up your opponents without obstructing the exit.



» [Color Computer 3] Mechanical constructs called Boreheads try to destroy your walls.



» [Color Computer 3] Boss encounters involve avoiding Malcolm Mortar while building a golden prison for him.



collected. Thirdly, the explosives have no effect on the game's inhabitants – they're simply there to blow up any walls you build in the wrong places. This latter mechanic is essential to making progress in the game's main stages as to activate a door to the next level you have to brick-up all your opponents without building walls that obstruct the only route from a stage's entrance to its exit.

To make matters more complicated, the two main types of aggressors you encounter each have a strategy to avoid entrapment. Mechanical constructs called Boreheads do their best to avoid you while destroying your walls as fast as you can build them and grinning monstrosities referred to as Fuzzies hunt you down and flick poisonous quills at you porcupine-style. Interestingly, any damage you take decreases your score rather than an energy bar, and since a zero-score ends the game this acts as an extra incentive to score any point going.

Before and after each set of three main stages, you get the chance to use any gold bricks you've accumulated to trap the game's eponymous antagonist Malcolm Mortar in his lair. The slightest contact with Malcolm is fatal, however, and the sparse stages where you meet him consist of regularly spaced pillars, which offer little protection from his attacks. Your only strategy then is to spend each boss encounter by adding bricks to Malcolm's golden prison until it's big enough for you to lure him into it.

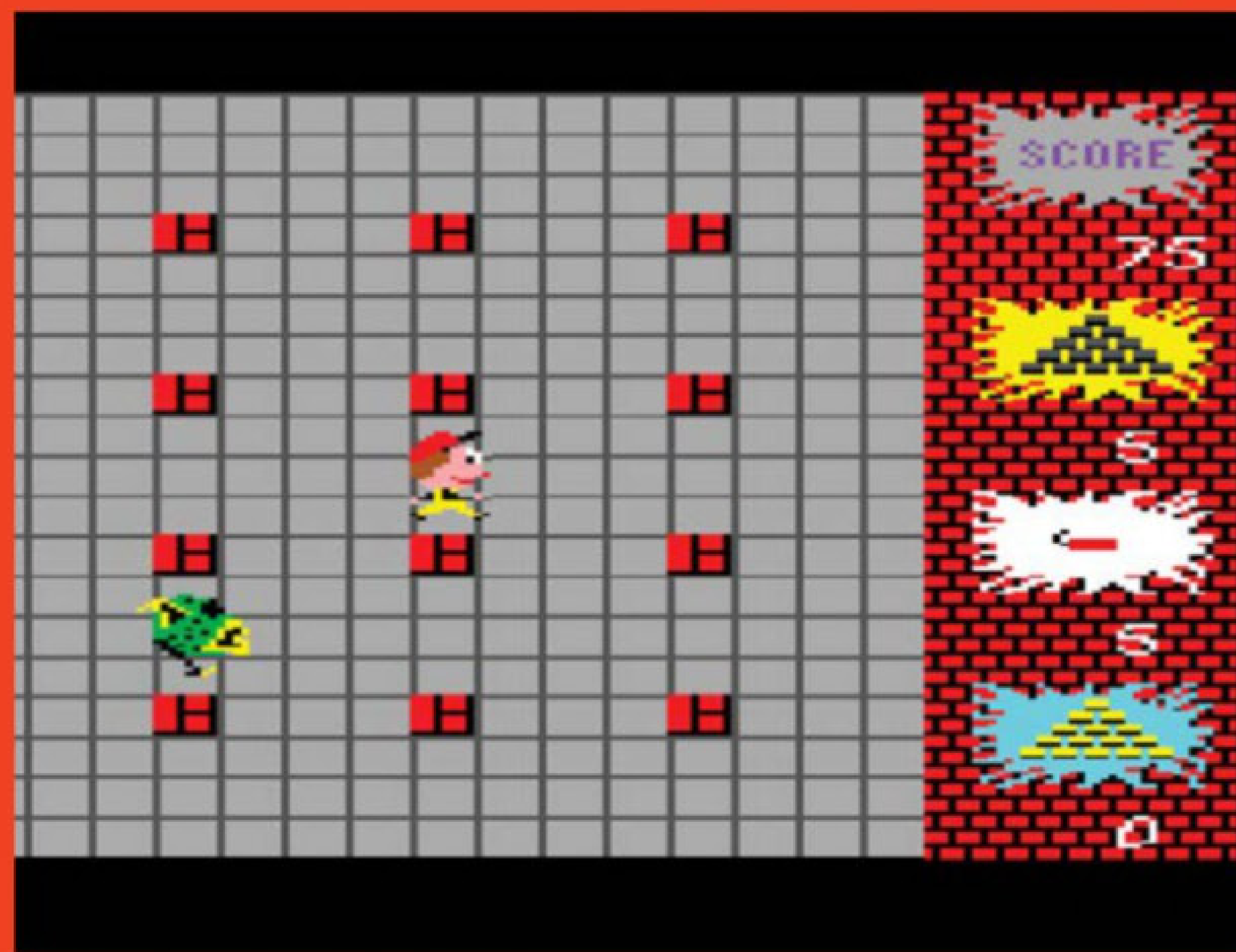
Other than clean presentation and cute sprites, the main cue *Malcolm Mortar*'s developers took from the outings of Hudson's mascot is how crucial well-worked mechanics are to gameplay. And in that respect, *Malcolm Mortar* does follow in *Bomberman*'s footsteps.



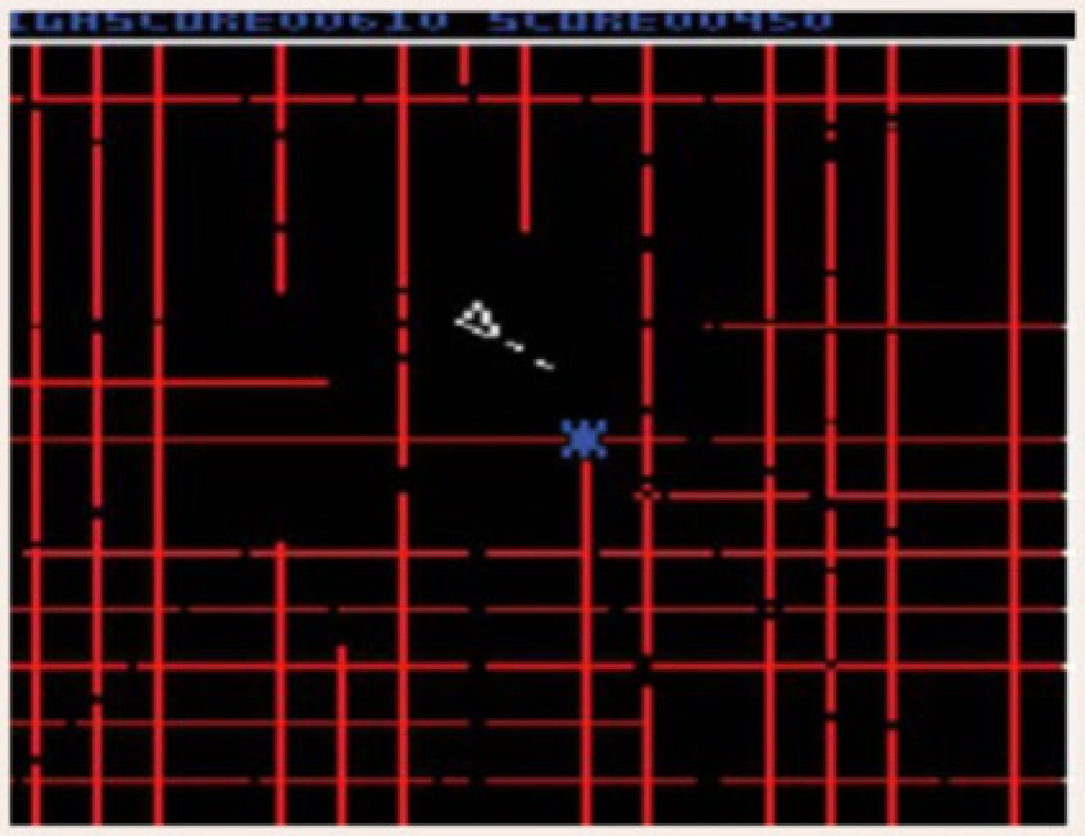
TRS-80 Color Computer photograph courtesy of Andreas Pernau.

» ABOUT TRS-80

- The original TRS-80 computer launched in late-1977 with black and white semi-graphics and rudimentary sound.
- Radio Shack's first colour system – the TRS-80 Color Computer – arrived in 1980.
- 16-bit opposition and lacklustre marketing resulted in the Color Computer 3 being the last in the TRS-80 line.



» [Color Computer 3] Malcolm's lair consists of pillars that offer little protection from his attacks.



» SPIDERCIDE

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: TIM SWISHER ■ YEAR: 1983

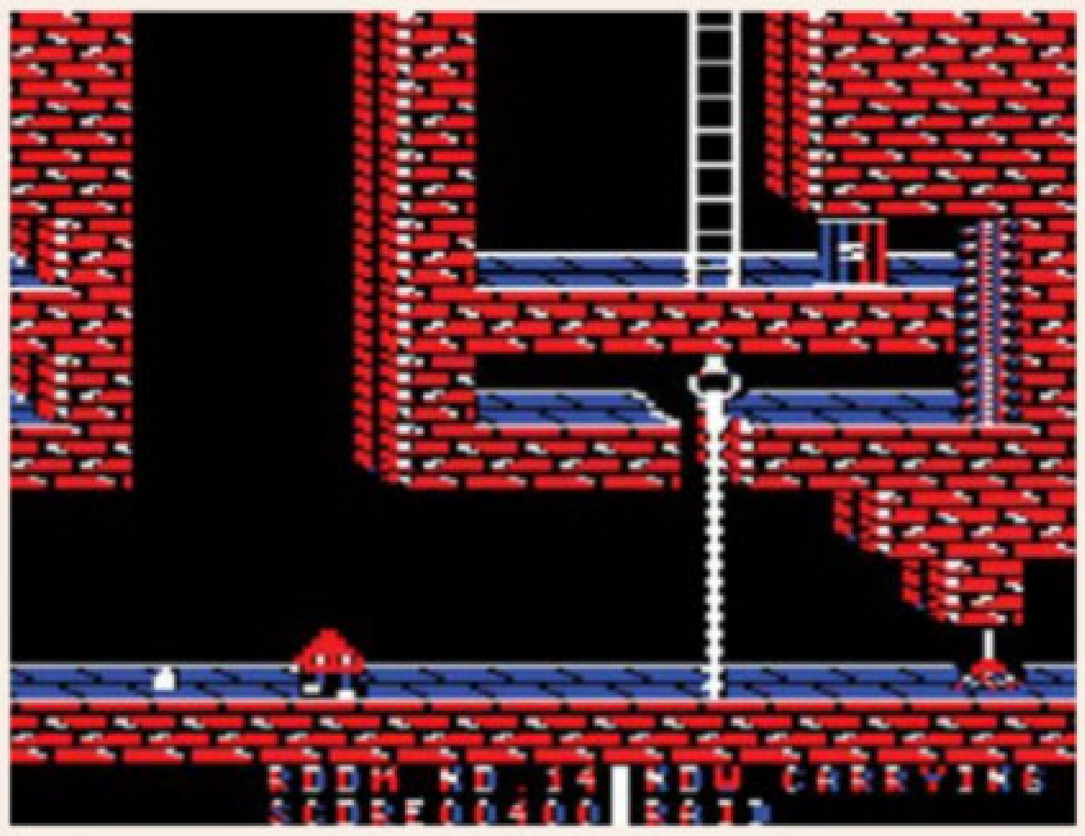
■ **Clearly Tim Swisher** took some inspiration from *Asteroids* when designing *Spidercide*, but the game's title hints at how having taken the Atari shooter as a starting point Tim then developed totally divergent gameplay for his creation. *Spidercide* features a ship much like the one in *Asteroids* – it rotates left and right, and moves forwards and backwards – but in place of floating space debris are spiders with a variety of move-sets. Your arachnid foes take a life on contact and spin deadly webs around your position if not shot down, which take ages to perforate with laser-fire.



» WIZARD'S DEN

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: MATT HARPER ■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Although essentially an** arcade adventure, *Wizard's Den* does have RPG elements such as stats that record your character's health and abilities, which are affected by the decisions you make and the actions you take. The game takes place in a four-way scrolling isometric world where the aim is to find a magic gemstone. Before doing so you have eight stages to clear, each of which features monsters and potions, provisions and weaponry. Where *Wizard's Den* shines is in combining three genres in such a way that the resultant gameplay still feels cohesive.



» DRAGON SLAYER

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: OLAF SCHROEDER ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **Solving the simple** puzzles in *Dragon Slayer* is deeply satisfying, perhaps because of the effort and lateral thinking involved in getting the right object to the right place in order to do so. For example, you need a pair of boots to cross a rough area but the boots are at the bottom of a shaft so you need a rope. The rope is behind a locked door and its key is some distance away. Which adds up to a lot of backtracking – especially since you can only carry one object at a time – and that's just the first level! Perhaps it's just as well *Dragon Slayer*'s puzzles are simple.

Minority Report

CRYSTAL CITY

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER 3 ■ DEVELOPER: JEREMY SPILLER ■ YEAR: 1990



» [Color Computer 3] *Crystal City* requires you keep your shields up while targeting opponents.

■ **Arriving towards the end of the commercial lifespan of the Color Computer 3, *Crystal City* really pushed the system's hardware to produce lightning-fast smooth scrolling and an eclectic set of expansive multi-coloured levels.**

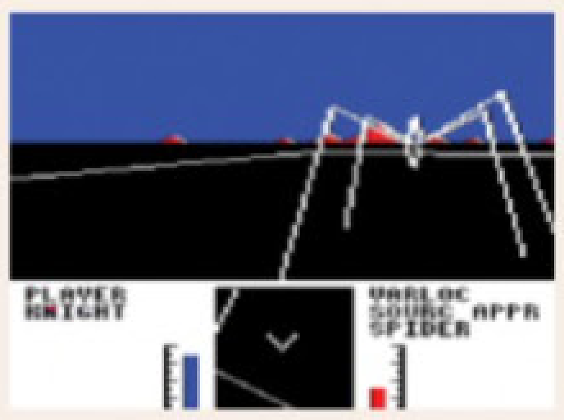
Crystal City has the feel of a straight shoot-'em-up, but playing it as one leads you directly to the game over screen. Instead, you find success through easing off on the trigger in order to collect rather than destroy fuel supplies, which drop into the game via parachute and boost your shields rather than your fuel level. To an extent, this tweak gives *Crystal City* a hybrid nature in that it adds an element of collection to the game's frenzied bouts of blasting. Also worth mentioning is that colliding with the scenery instantly ends the game, and, naturally, the fuel you need to collect lands pixels away from one background feature or another. Finally, each stage is completed by taking on a boss, each of which require multiple shots to a weak spot in order to take down.

What really makes *Crystal City* so challenging, though, is that everything it throws at you comes at such a pace and that its action takes place in ever more confined areas as the game progresses. And while you try to balance keeping your shields up with targeting opponents your senses are assaulted by the game's backgrounds constantly changing colours and explosions that resemble firework displays. But in doing so, *Crystal City* shows off technical advances that enhance its gameplay rather than just looking pretty.

» VARLOC

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: GREG ZUMWALT ■ YEAR: 1985

■ Although *Varloc* borrows the concepts behind the chess-like *Archon*, the post-move battles in Greg Zumwalt's tribute are far superior.



» STELLAR LIFE LINE

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: STEVE BJORK ■ YEAR: 1983

■ Steve Bjork took cues from *Defender* when making *Stellar Life Line*. This shooter sees you protecting a defenceless convey from meteors and aliens.





» PHOTON

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER 3
■ DEVELOPER: JEFF STEIDL ■ YEAR: 1991

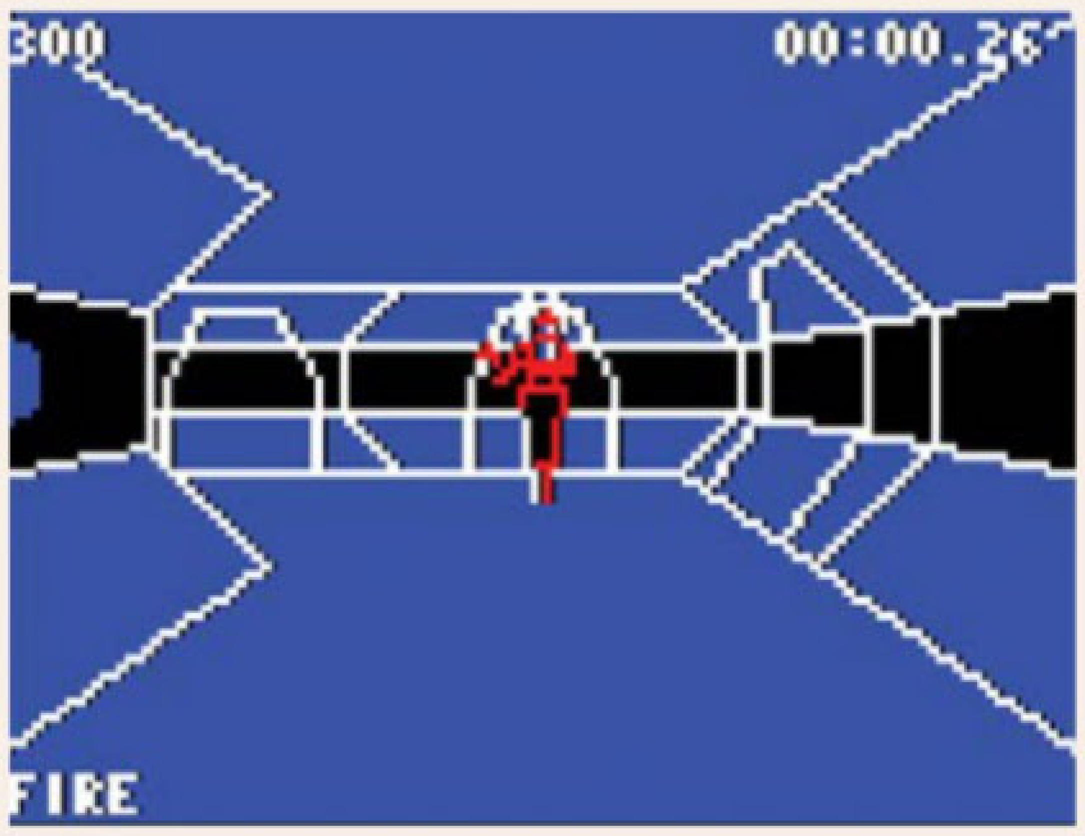
■ **A devious top-down** puzzler, *Photon* applies a simple set of rules to a complex scenario. With the use of a cog-like avatar, your objective is to reach an exit without your power-bar being reduced to zero. Standing in your way are inanimate objects that can either be pulled or pushed – providing nothing obstructs their paths – and a variety of energy-zapping opponents. Coloured balls continually roll but can have their route altered by rearranging objects. More dangerous foes require containment. The key to *Photon* is to not let adversaries loose or reroute them to your disadvantage.



» F-16 ASSAULT

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: KEVIN HOARE ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Kevin Hoare worked** on several Color Computer titles – either as coder, artist or both – with his output being especially notable for attractive visuals and polished presentation. *F-16 Assault* also plays well and provides some pretty tough top-down shoot-'em-up action. The game's title neatly explains your mission, but more specifically your goal is to undertake a bombing run in enemy territory. Opposition planes and helicopters that you fail to hit before they take off meet you in aerial combat where you have to shoot them down before they do the same to you.

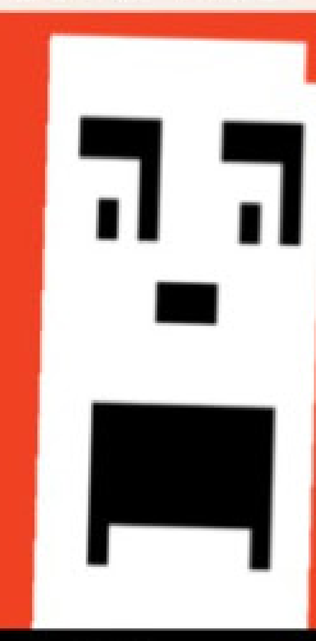


»FEMBOT'S REVENGE

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: COLORQUEST ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **The third in** ColorQuest's *Cimeeon* series, *Fembot's Revenge* reuses the previous entry's 3D graphics engine but cleverly slots shoot-'em-up sequences into the trilogy's action/text adventure-based formula. The way the title's gameplay works is that basic actions like walking around are performed with a single key-press, but advanced activities involving interaction with your surroundings are handled by typing commands. *Fembot's Revenge* provides a first-person perspective of a space station built around a maze of tight corridors, which gives the title a tense, claustrophobic feel.





13 GHOSTS

■ SYSTEM: TRS-80 MODEL 4 ■ DEVELOPER: BRYAN EGGERS / LARRY PAYNE ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **The iconic visuals created for *13 Ghosts* look impressive enough in screenshot form, but are even more so when seen in motion.** What impresses most is that the title's developers managed to get so much character into the animated ghouls that haunt the game and so much detail into their scrolling monochrome world. Graphical considerations aside, *13 Ghosts* also delivers on gameplay with the title probably being best described as a prototypical into-the-screen shooter. Even though it runs on Tandy's early-Eighties Model 4, *13 Ghosts* is certainly no slouch.

13 Ghosts plays a little like *Operation Wolf* but features unique mechanics. Your objective is to blast a path from a train station to a haunted house while keeping the number of on-screen ghosts below 13 – failure to do so results in a skeleton boss rushing towards the screen *3D Monster Maze*-style and ending the game. The more dangerous the ghost shot the more progress made towards your goal, but each ghost that escapes wakes another bringing your tally closer to 13. Shooting spiders reduces your ghost-count, though, and reaching the haunted house resets the count to four in time for the return journey to the station. In total, 32 round-trips are needed to exorcise the game's haunted town, but each trip sees the ghosts adopt more complex flight patterns making them that much harder to dispatch. In all areas, *13 Ghosts* plays to the Model 4's strengths and for that reason it's a standout title for the system.



» [TRS-80 Model 4] A haunted cemetery in the monochrome world of the into-the-screen shooter *13 Ghosts*.

» PEGASUS AND THE PHANTOM RIDERS

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: DAVID FIGGE ■ YEAR: 1984

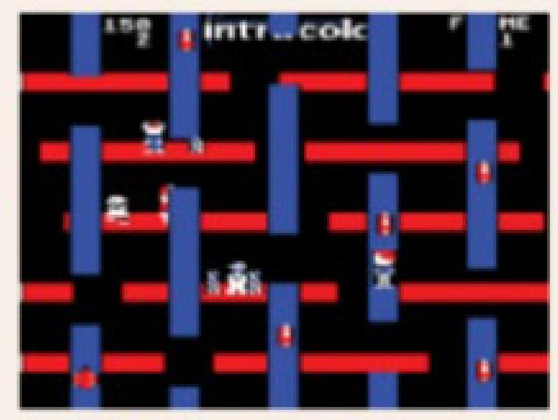
■ While clearly inspired by *Joust*, this builds on the coin-op's mechanics by adding faux-3D islands that you get nearer to each wave and additional hazards.

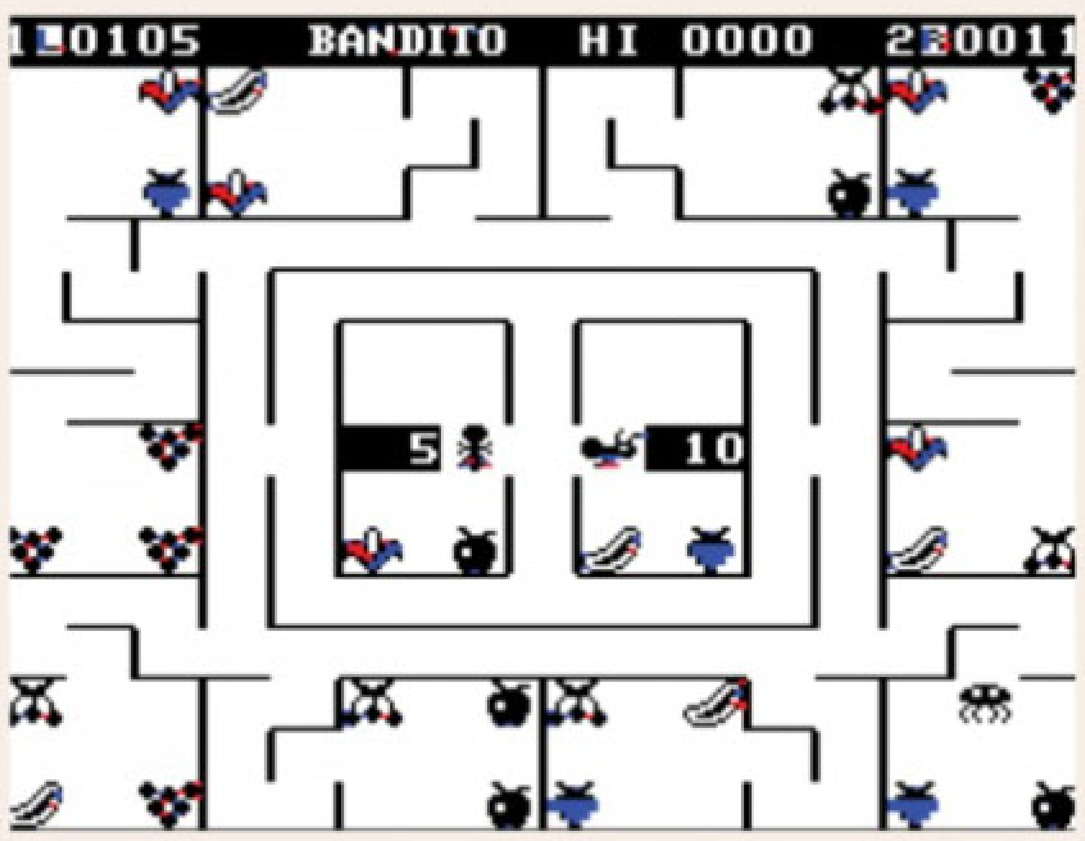


» CANDY CO

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: DAVID CLARK ■ YEAR: 1984

■ The original premise behind *Candy Co* is to leap from one horizontally or vertically moving platform to another collecting candy and saving people.





» EL BANDITO

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: DAVID CRANDALL ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **Although it offers** a one-player mode, *El Bandito* isn't much fun to play solo. It becomes obvious when played against someone else, however, that the game was intended to be a two-player experience. *El Bandito* sees you guide an ant around a top-down maze collecting food while avoiding spiders. You score points by getting far-off snacks home but carrying food slows you down enough that spiders can catch you so occasionally you have to drop your meal and run. This is typically when Player Two steals your lunch, but their reduced speed often sees the tables turned.



» SHOCK TROOPER

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER
■ DEVELOPER: ROB SHAW ■ YEAR: 1985

■ **Rather than split-second** reaction times, *Shock Trooper* demands careful timing and strategy to pass each of its stages. A key mechanic requires restrained usage of a rifle that is effective against force-fields and munitions but also gives off radiation, which you can only absorb so much of. The best approach to the game is to treat each screen like a puzzle where you work out the safest path through that level's dangers before dealing with them. Between this need for lateral thinking and its caution-inducing radiation mechanic, *Shock Trooper* becomes something more than a simple platformer.



» TIME BANDIT

■ SYSTEM: COLOR COMPUTER ■ DEVELOPER: BILL DUNLEVY / HARRY LAFNEAR ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **Released during the** same year as *Dandy*, *Time Bandit* is another maze game populated with spawning opponents and portals that link levels together. To be fair, though, *Time Bandit* shares as many differences with Atari's classic dungeon crawler as it does similarities. Firstly, it involves time travel – to fantasy, space and Wild West eras – and secondly, its play revolves around navigating tight spaces in search of keys to open a number of locks. Repeat visits to each era are required to complete the game, but each trip features slightly different mazes, which helps to keep things interesting.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO

- » **Featured System:** GameCube
- » **Year:** 2005
- » **Publisher:** Capcom
- » **Developer:** In-House
- » **Key People:** Shinji Mikami, Director; Hiroyuki Kobayashi, Producer

GO DEEPER

- » **Hideki Kamiya's classic *Devil May Cry* started out as a concept for *Resident Evil 4*.**
- » **Two scenario writers had penned a narrative before Shinji Mikami took over the show.**

43.



» [GameCube] Wildly spraying bullets at these overgrown grasshoppers is not at all recommended.

RESIDENT EVIL 4

Despite its action focus, Resi 4 is still a horror masterpiece today according to Paul Davies…



» [GameCube] "Watch out for the… too late. Hey, did you notice that… guess not. Wait for me!"

THE BACKGROUND

It was to be the final *Resident Evil*. Five years in gestation, evolving through multiple forms, it was in danger of losing semblance to the trilogy that went before. Even today there are fans of the series that feel *Resident Evil 4* was too much of a departure (while still bemoaning the awkward controls of the originals). Yet, with hindsight, *Resident Evil 4* is regarded as not only the best of the bunch, but also one of the greatest videogames ever, claiming an XL Attaché Case full of awards.

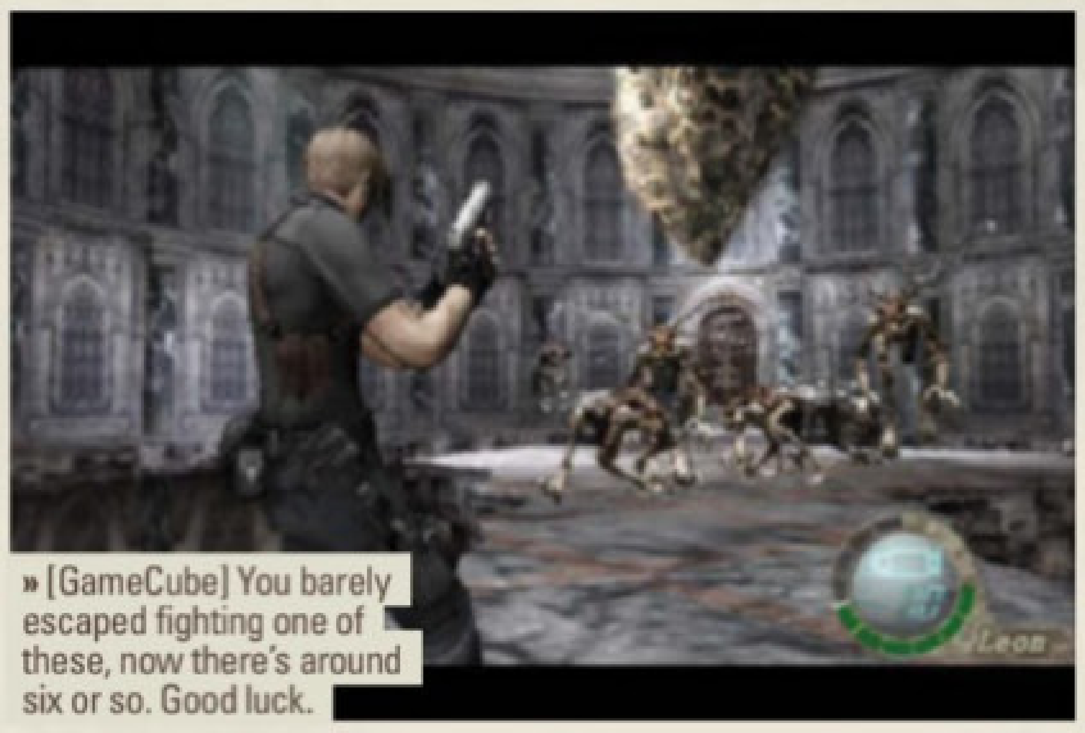
At the time of its GameCube release in 2005 Capcom's survival-horror saga was facing challengers from all sides. Konami's spooky *Silent Hill* had reached its fourth installment with the hallucinatory *The Room*, there had been two *Fatal Frame* outings from Tecmo with a third on the way. Hideki Kamiya's trailblazing 'Stylish Hard Action' *Devil May Cry* had been cutting everybody's work out since 2001.

News of Shinji Mikami being back at the helm combined with a five-year absence reminded gamers how hungry we all were for a comeback. And with Japanese horror becoming fashionable through movies such as *Dark Water* and *One Missed Call* the stage was well and truly set.

THE GAME

Peering over the shoulder of Leon S Kennedy, jogging down a countryside track, we are thematically, geographically and mentally very far removed from Raccoon City. Exposed in the open, in broad daylight no less, this doesn't feel like *Resident Evil* at all – not yet. However, there is something eerily compelling about the found-footage Eighties video-nasty vibe to proceedings that, okay, this is already scary.

We remember thinking, upon our first playthrough of *RE4* almost a decade ago, "I wish this guy would just get out of the way…!" A pseudo first-person approach, with its tactical aim bolted on, was a giant leap out of the magnetic boots experience of *Resident Evil* 1-3. Yet during the 18 hours or so it takes to reach the end of Leon's presidential mission, deliberate and measured action is something that you learn to appreciate. Sure, it seems odd that Special Agent Kennedy is unable to run


» [GameCube] You barely escaped fighting one of these, now there's around six or so. Good luck.


» [GameCube] A truck. It isn't stopping. You'd better figure out a way to stop it in 3… 2… 1… dead.

and gun, dive and shoot. For *Resident Evil*, though, it works. You can keep your Wii controls.

Initially the striking thing about *Resident Evil 4* was how we were seeing *Resident Evil: Remake* quality environments in real time, and added to that so much freedom available to make tactical choices in these environments. Dealing with this kind of overshadowed the Los Illuminados narrative for a while… at least until the point that the Ganados (infected Spanish villagers) started sprouting tentacles from their necks.

Capcom's design and animation is exemplary throughout this trek that takes in six chapters across three main acts. Equally admirable is the difficulty progression, something of a lost art, which keeps players in sight of hope no matter how many times the "You Died" message is smeared across the screen.

Managing the contents of Leon's attaché case, deciding between precise distance or close-quarters rapid-fire arms, becomes an obsession all by itself. Considering which weapon serves best versus specific enemy archetypes becomes self-rewarding in time for our first incredulous encounter with El Gigante (mountain of a mutant man). Briefly, on the subject of El Gigante, quick-time events are brilliantly integrated. They especially make chapter 4-1's Verdugo boss battle a heart-in-mouth experience, but in every case they're unobtrusive, logical and keep us on our toes.

Returning to *Resident Evil 4* after such a long sojourn, it's surprising how entertaining it still is even after dallying with *Gears Of War* or *The Last Of Us*.

We're kept guessing as to who the ultimate evil is among Bitores, Salazar, Krauser or Lord Saddler. Their respective minions are among the most imaginative ever to grace a monster hunt.

In the tradition of saving the best part until last, boss battles – in particular Salazar – are simply out of this world. Whether trying to land the world's biggest fish, dazing a distorted skeletal priest, aiming for the heart of a dwarf amid writhing tentacles or dashing between collapsing platforms buying time to flee a Plagas-powered fiend, these are frankly astonishing scenes that have rarely been matched nor bettered.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

In showing its age, rather than being a negative, *Resident Evil 4* presents one of its greatest assets: that it proved so influential. It raised the bar in production values, wrote the book on 'How to QTE' (though it didn't invent the mechanic), and gave Epic Games half its blueprint for *Gears Of War* – the other half being Namco's cover-based shooter *Kill Switch*.

The visuals, maxed out at 480p, are more than a match for most games released a decade down the line. Indeed, the fuzziness combined with the subdued colour palette, add to the distinction. Here is a colossal adventure for starters, around 20 hours average, but it's just as enjoyable to revisit after settling upon a preferred set of tools and tactics. A masterclass from Shinji Mikami. ✱

Things of note

BAD-ASS BOSS BATTLES



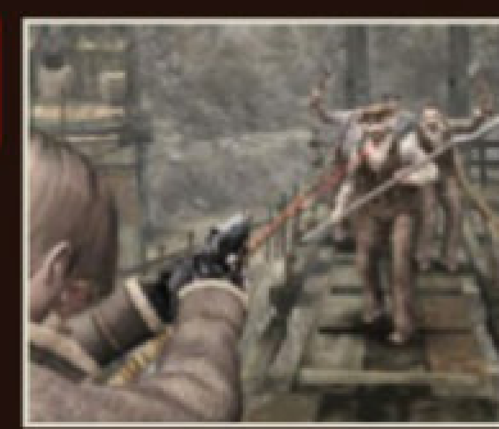
Typically just as you're running out of ammo and critically low on health, along comes a monster the size of the screen to bite your head off.

QTE FTW IMO



Contextual actions that require split-second response times allow *Resident Evil 4* to build on the drama without overcomplicating the basic control scheme.

VHS QUALITY GRAPHICS



Grainy visual effects contribute to the atmosphere and hide the shortcomings of second-generation 3D modeling on consoles.

MAN AT ARMS



Weapon variety is not just for show. Each gun or grenade has a tactical benefit, suiting many styles of play. The way that enemies recoil under fire is… pleasing.

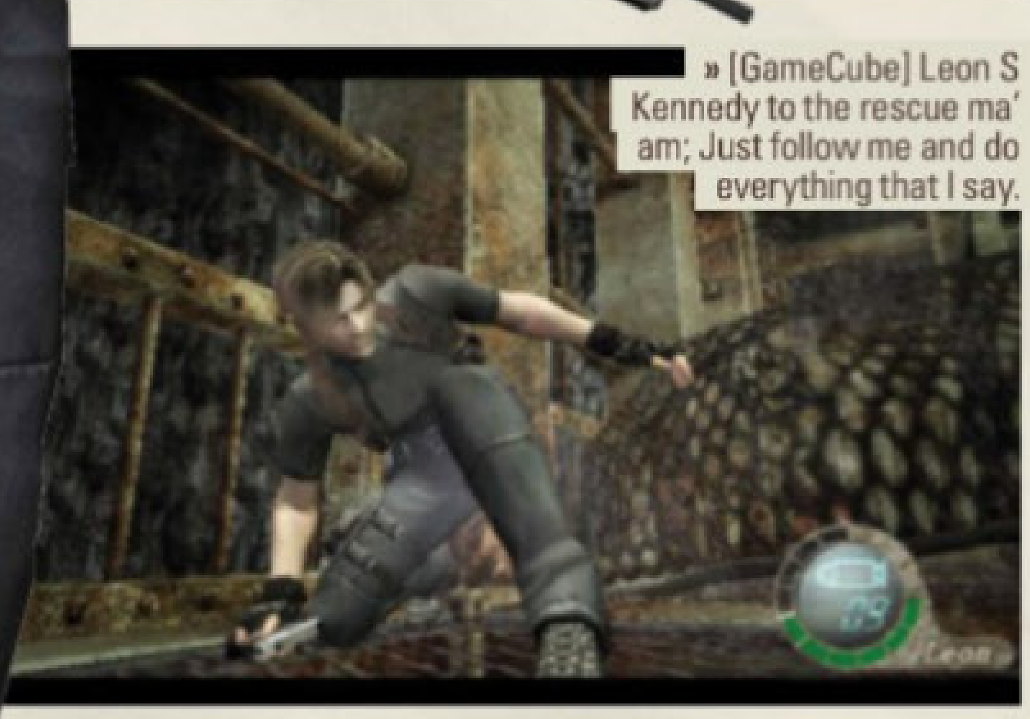
SEE YOU COMING



They're not always the smartest tools in the box, but when the enemy is working as a team to halt Leon's progress you can count on their unrelenting ruthlessness.


» [GameCube] Rushing down weakened enemies to start hacking away with a combat knife… bliss.


» [GameCube] Choose the rifle and you can snipe at the guy waiting for Leon at the end of this line.


» [GameCube] Leon S Kennedy to the rescue ma' am; Just follow me and do everything that I say.

The Bluffer's guide to

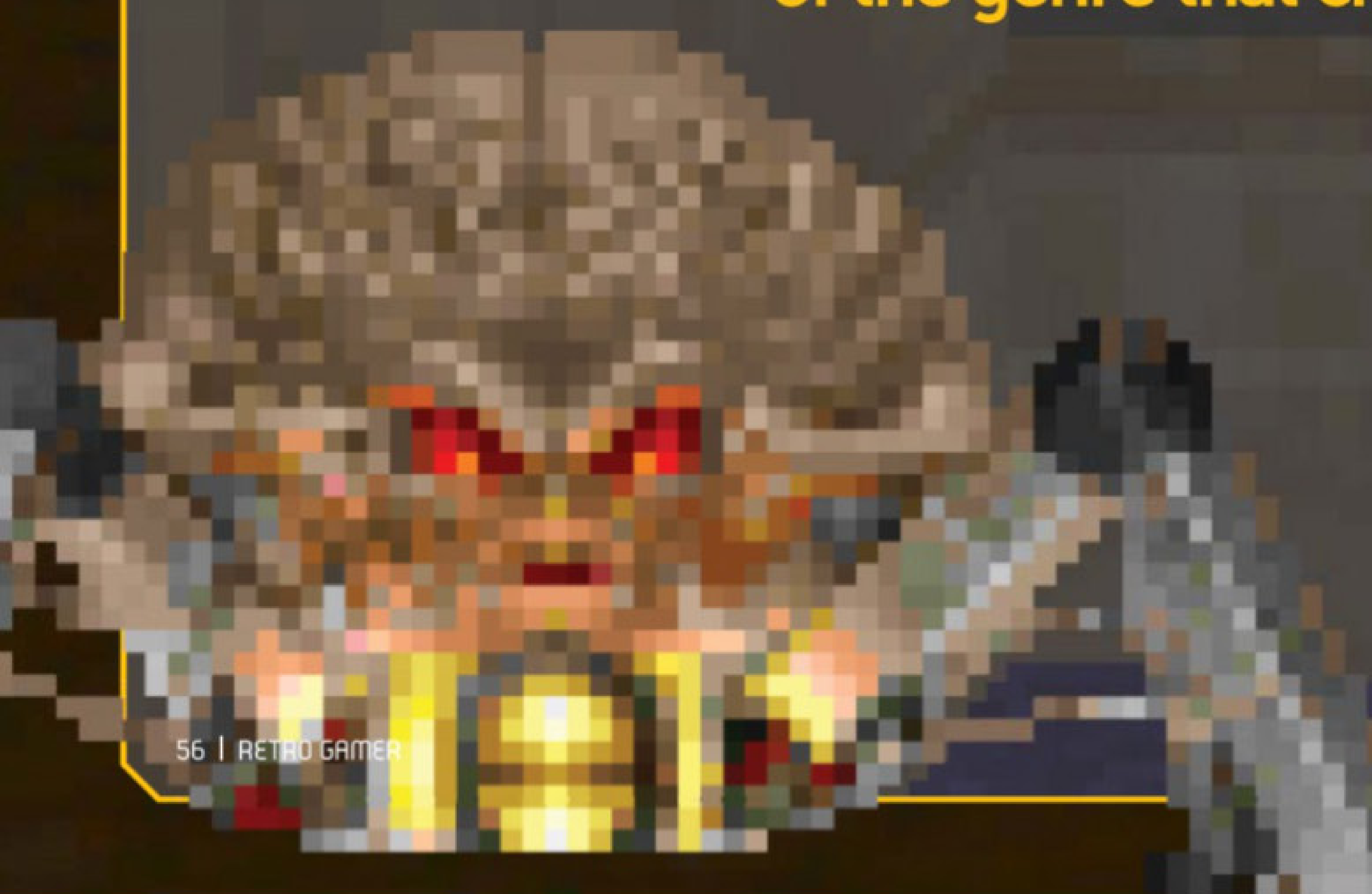


FIRST-
SHOO



It's the most popular genre in the world and has been so for over 20 years – the first-person shooter really is one of the main pillars of gaming. Ian Dransfield charts the development of the genre that changed everything







PERSON
TERS

What's the original first-person shooter? Not the first one ever released that technically belongs in the genre – *Maze War* or *Spasim* – but the game that set the standard for what we now expect from our FPS games? Would it surprise you to hear that John Romero, co-creator of *Doom* and legend in the field of the FPS, chose one of his own games?

"Well, that's easy: it's *Wolfenstein 3D*," he tells us, "It featured the most basic FPS staples: FPS combat, multiple weapons that ramp in power, power-ups, item pickups, secret rooms, find the exit and progress to the next level, huge explorable levels and super-fast gameplay."

It's hard to argue with the man – while elements of the first-person shooter had been building up over the 15-or-so years prior to *Wolfenstein*'s release, it was id's 1992 game that really brought everything together in one complete package. The ray-casting of *Hovertank 3D*, *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*'s texture mapping, *Catacomb 3-D*'s visible weaponry, hunting players down in *Maze War* and other elements all existed. But *Wolfenstein 3D* was the eureka moment for an entire genre, and its effects are still being felt today, with first-person shooters bringing in billions of dollars around the globe.

But why? What is it about the first-person shooter that makes it so popular? Why is it the go-to gaming experience for many millions of people? Viewing a videogame world through your eyes, usually sporting a gun of some sort and blasting your way through hundreds (or thousands) of bad buggers as you navigate ▶

Bluffer's guide

KNOW YOUR FPS

FPS
■ It may seem a bit daft, but you have to define what's meant by first-person shooter – some count flight sims in the genre, for example.

COVER
■ Where it was once circle-strafing, it is now the act of ceaselessly hiding behind cover that we do to save our hides.

DEATHMATCH
■ Your classic online mode where individuals fight each other, with the winner usually decided by who gets to a set score first.

HEADSHOT
■ Indicating a shot that has done heavy damage, the phrase is also used colloquially among certain groups to signify a stinging verbal put-down.

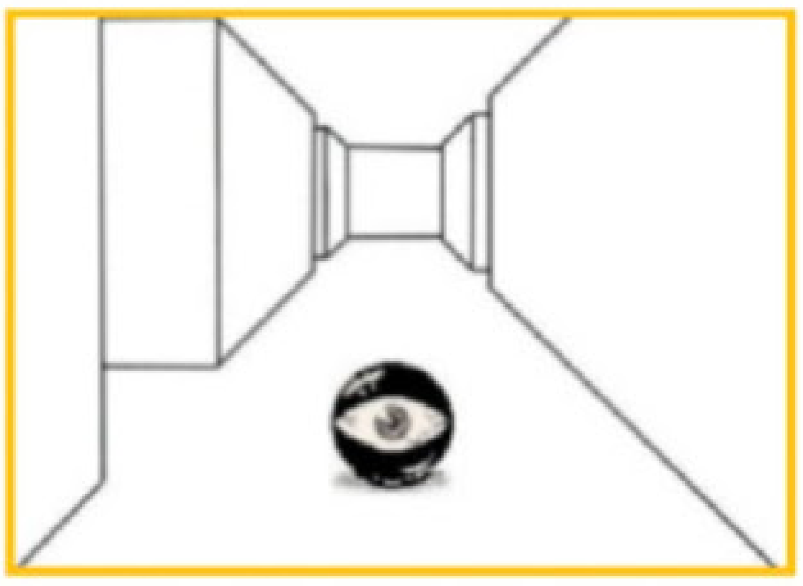
CAMPING
■ An irritating thing people online do to ruin your fun, whereby they 'camp' in one advantageous position. See also: bunny-hopping, teamkilling.

HUD
■ What you see (or don't see) on the screen, the heads-up display has always been important – iconic, even.

MOUSE AND KEYBOARD
■ Joypads are great and work fantastically for controlling FPS titles, but there's a hardcore contingent who won't accept anything other than this control method.

RED BARRELS
■ Enemies will gather around these objects. If you shoot them, these objects will explode. You shoot a lot of them in FPS games.

» [Imlac PDS-1] There's debate if *Maze War* was the first real first-person game or not – but it's definitely one of the earliest.





» [PC] It didn't begin the genre, but *Wolfenstein 3D* made it absolutely essential, and changed gaming forever.

▶ from point A to point B – with obligatory obstacles and puzzles in the way – has resulted in almost all of gaming's Big Leaps Forward. And it's never stopped being popular.

Scott Miller, founder of *Duke Nukem 3D* creator (and *Wolfenstein* publisher) 3D Realms, says it's simple why this is a genre that has resonated for so long: "It revolutionised gaming, because it made real the promise of real-time 3D games. "Until the FPS, the few 3D games that existed were turn-based, slow, and lacking in intensity, like the *Wizardry* series, or *Ultima Underworld* (which only beat *Wolfenstein 3D* to market by a few months). 3D shooters opened the floodgates to the exciting world of realistic games, which matched the view perspective we experience in real life."

You don't need to have any real knowledge of… well, *anything* to know where the genre went next. There were releases here and there following *Wolfenstein 3D*, with games like *Blake Stone: Aliens Of Gold* showing up, but then things changed forever. *Doom* was unleashed. We're still feeling the effects today. It was *fast*, it was stunning, it was balanced and fun, it was addictive (and not in the evil way), it was hilariously violent, it was scary when it needed to be and so satisfying at other times, it was a challenge, it was everything gaming needed at that point. It was *Doom*.

> **"3D shooters opened the floodgates to the exciting world of realistic games"**
> Scott Miller

And it brought other factors to the mainstream, just as *Wolfenstein 3D* had before it – things that already existed and were already popular, but hadn't had the exposure. *Doom* popularised network multiplayer at a scale never before seen, and it spread like a virus thanks to it being distributed as shareware.

Wolfenstein had been released as shareware and had seen success because of it – the first portion of the game being available for free, with the rest of the game being charged for. But with *Doom*, as with so many other elements in and around the game, it was taken up a notch. Scott puts it thusly: "Shareware played a *huge* role in popularising the FPS. In short, Apogee invented the idea of releasing episodes online, and we released the first episode of *Wolfenstein 3D* this way (and later FPS games, including *Doom* and *Duke 3D*, were released this way). This allowed these games to get worldwide exposure and have a global impact, and literally tens of millions of people got the game for free who may not have otherwise gone to a store to pay for it. So, practically overnight it became a worldwide sensation."

There's another part of *Doom*'s impact on the FPS that isn't discussed as much – something that helped the game and the genre as a whole


» [Atari ST] One thing ST owners had over their Amiga-owning enemies was *MIDI Maze* – an FPS progenitor.


» [PC] Duke's finest hour, *DN3D* was stupendously ahead of its time and is still riotous fun to this day.



SELECTED TIMELINE

1974 – 1987 – 1988 – 1990 – 1991 – 1992 – 1993

MAZE WAR
■ The original progenitor of the on-foot, first-person action game, *Maze War* is admittedly rather basic these days.

MIDI MAZE
■ The Atari ST was home to this proto-FPS, which saw players controlling a *Pac-Man*-alike from a first-person view.



ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: THE STYGIAN ABYSS
■ Initially overshadowed somewhat by *other* releases in the same year, *Abyss* has since seen a resurgence in its reputation.



WOLFENSTEIN 3D
■ The granddaddy of them all, *Wolfenstein 3D* wasn't the first – but it was the first to bring everything together properly.

DOOM
■ *Doom* is still the game that first-person shooter developers look to for ideas, and it's over 20 years old. It's just that good. It changed everything.

MARATHON
■ Not to be outdone, the Mac had its own FPS – an early effort from Bungie, *Marathon* was ahead of its time in many respects.



FIVE ESSENTIAL GAMES

If you want to be schooled in everything great about the FPS, play these games



DOOM

■ 1993 ■ VARIOUS

It changed gaming for generations of players, mixing fast-paced play with imaginative design and the now rather quaint ultraviolence. Even now *Doom* still stands out as a brilliant mix of clever design and tight mechanics – which is likely why it ends up getting re-released on every format under the sun.



DEUS EX

■ 2000 ■ VARIOUS

The third game in the series brought back a lot of the magic, but it's the original FPS/RPG hybrid that still gets the nod here. A dark and foreboding cyberpunk dystopia, *Deus Ex* never holds hands or patronises the player – and it lets them loose in a vast playground of exploration and experimentation.



HALF-LIFE 2

■ 2004 ■ VARIOUS

In many eyes the single-player element of the genre was perfected with the arrival of *Half-Life 2* – strong, focused narrative; solid gunplay; imaginative design; killer looks – the game had it all. It still has it all, in fact, and as far as some of us are concerned still hasn't been bettered to this day.



SWAT 4

■ 2005 ■ PC

Realistic shooters deserve a recommendation, and we can think of none better than *SWAT 4*. Mixing strategic, planning-based (and realistic) emergent action with well-written set pieces could have gone horribly wrong. It did not. *SWAT 4* is magic, and a perfect example of how thoughtful the genre can be.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

■ 2007 ■ VARIOUS

Much is said about *COD*'s effect on the dumbing down of the genre, but that's doing a fine series a disservice. Playing *Modern Warfare* – both online and in single-player – is still bearing witness to a masterclass in tight design with multi-million dollar bombast.



» [iPhone] Originally on Mac, Bungie's *Marathon* games have been re-released on a number of formats – including iOS.



flourish more than it ever would have otherwise. The ability to easily modify the game using WAD files opened not just first-person shooters, but gaming as a whole to the creative impulses of the users themselves. Everyone who dabbled with *Doom* in the Nineties almost certainly played with a fan-made WAD at some point, whether it was the famous *Aliens* version of the game, the once-beautiful UAC DEAD or just one that made your guns shout 'd'oh!' a la Homer Simpson.

It democratised design in a way that hadn't been anywhere near as widespread before, and it's something that still goes on today. From that jumping off point there have been mods made into full games – *Counter-Strike, Team Fortress, DayZ, Killing Floor, Dear Esther, The Stanley Parable* and countless others. *Doom* didn't *invent* the concept of making your own game from an existing title, but the fact it was so widespread and popular meant it helped in a way no other game could possibly have. It changed gaming, it changed how games were made, it changed *who* made them. Its impact cannot be understated.

One man who has seen first-hand the positive effects of what the world of modding can do is *DayZ*'s Dean Hall: "*Doom* was actually one of the first PC games I modded (the first was *UFO: Enemy Unknown*)," he tells us, "Mostly I was involved in *Doom* for the multiplayer so I started modding specifically for that, making levels that I would play with my friends at high school in the computer lab over lunch.

"I'm a bit on the young side to say what impact *Doom* WADs and modding had on the industry at large, but I know for me it came at the right time. Here was this ubiquitous ▶

1994 – **DUKE NUKEM 3D**
■ The last hurrah for sprite-based shooters, *DN3D* was, is and forever will be a classic – unlike its eventual sequel, *Duke Nukem Forever.*

1995 – **QUAKE**
■ id had the FPS genre twice already, so it went and did it again with *Quake*. Fully 3D, quick, atmospheric and with fantastic online play.

1996 – **GOLDENEYE 007**
■ We all thought consoles couldn't do FPS games properly, then Rare came and showed us how wrong we'd all been.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX
■ By no means the first tactical FPS, *Rainbow Six* nonetheless popularised the idea of the thinking-person's shooter.

1997 – **SYSTEM SHOCK 2**
■ The melding of FPS, RPG and horror had been going on a while, but *System Shock 2* perfected it. Still a classic.

1998 – **HALF-LIFE**
■ With the release of *Half-Life*, id's crown had slipped. Valve's game upped the ante for the genre, and once again, things were never the same.

1999 – **QUAKE III: ARENA/ UNREAL TOURNAMENT**
■ A double-entry for the two big-hitters that popularised a change in FPS players' attitudes: they wanted to play online, and play online only.



DID YOU KNOW?

1 *Wolfenstein 3D* releases in 1992, and while a genre isn't created per se, the template for what it should be is finally set in stone. The FPS is born.

2 Just 18 months after id Software created the template for the genre, it tore it to pieces and drew up a new draft: *Doom* reinvented the FPS in 1993.

3 Thanks to *Doom* – and the likes of Bungie's *Marathon* – network play becomes hugely popular and is tightly bound to the FPS genre evermore.

4 Completing a triple-whammy of genre-defining releases, id brings out *Quake* in 1996. The FPS is, once again, reinvented – online play and fully 3D worlds and characters lead the charge.

5 The same year as *Quake*, 3D Realms brings out *Duke Nukem 3D*. It isn't ignored, and with good reason – it's a bona-fide classic full of exciting, unique features.

6 In 1997 Rare prove that consoles can actually be used for the FPS genre, creating *GoldenEye 007* – which also proves that not all film tie-ins are bad.

7 This time around id isn't the one to reinvent the genre – a plucky upstart named Valve releases *Half-Life* in 1998, and the rest is… well, you know the rest.

8 The year 2000 sees mass hysteria at computers going haywire, though mostly because of the thinking person's shooter, *Deus Ex* – a beloved title even today.

9 After serious delays, *Half-Life 2* hits in 2004. It's almost getting boring by this point, but once again Valve redefines what a first-person shooter is and can be. It has yet to be bettered.

10 *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* hits in 2007, bringing a superb mix of single and multiplayer action that changed the FPS genre again. Some say not for the better.

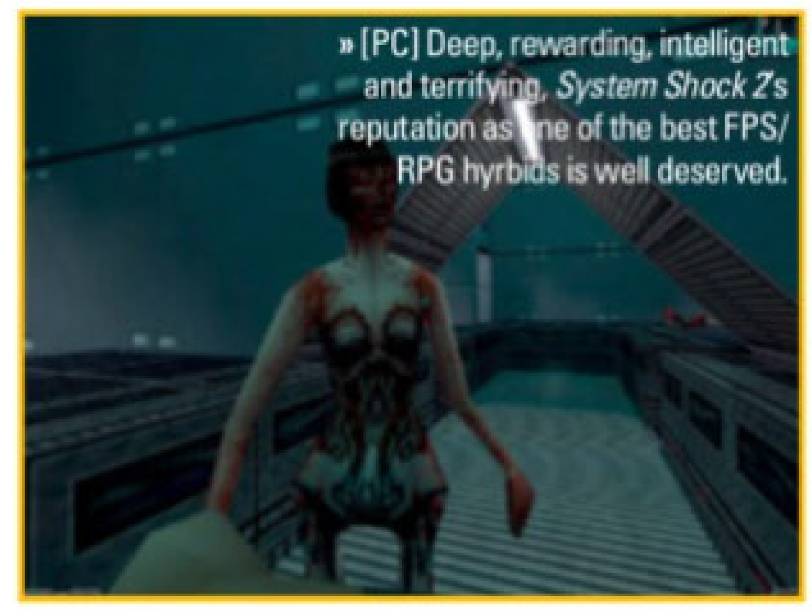


» [PC] There was a time where, when id wanted to change everything, id changed everything. *Quake* was one of those times.





» [PC] The mid-Nineties was a heyday of creative, unique shooters. Also silly, violent ones like *Blood*.



» [PC] Deep, rewarding, intelligent and terrifying. *System Shock 2*'s reputation as one of the best FPS/RPG hyrbids is well deserved.

▶ game that had a simple method of disseminating user-created content files, right at a time when my school had new computer labs and access to the internet. Everyone wanted to play it, and that meant a captive audience wanting a new *Doom* level each week – hopefully each better than the last."

1994's *System Shock* intelligently blended RPG elements into an FPS framework, while Bungie's *Marathon* expanded greatly by adding now-common multiplayer modes like king of the hill – while Bethesda's 1995 *Terminator* tie-in, *Future Shock*, introduced a fully-3D world and mouselook as standard a year before *Quake* was even released.

But then, in 1996, *Quake was* released. For the third time in a row, id had moved the goalposts and changed everything about the genre – and again it was by refining what had come before, rather than inventing anything particularly new. As George Broussard acknowledges: "Nobody in the world could compete with id in 1993-1996. Creating *Wolfenstein*, *Doom* and *Quake* back to back is like winning the NBA finals three years in a row. Legendary."

Quake brought full 3D to a large audience, retained the speed and clever design of *Doom* and added in one big hitter in the shape of a big focus on online play. It was something that less hardcore gamers of the time didn't even know they wanted, but they lapped it up.

Meanwhile, 3D Realms had also brought out a big-hitter in the FPS

> **"Creating Wolfenstein, Doom and Quake back to back is like winning the NBA three years in a row"**
> George Broussard

2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007

DEUS EX (2000)
■ While a lot of gamers were heading online to battle, some wanted deep, intelligent single-player experiences. Like *Deus Ex*, then.

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED (2001)
■ At some point people had forgotten consoles could actually handle FPS games, so it was up to Bungie to remind them.

METROID PRIME (2003)
■ Not to be outdone by Microsoft, Nintendo had a unique and memorable FPS of its own for the GameCube.

PLANETSIDE (2003)
■ The trend towards online-only shooters had been trundling along a while, but *PlanetSide* knocked everything up a notch.

HALF-LIFE 2 (2004)
■ The game everything else still apes some ten years down the line – never bettered, never actually given a proper sequel.

BIOSHOCK (2007)
■ *System Shock* wasn't about to come back, but a spiritual successor filled the gap – and filled it well.

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE (2007)
■ Arguably the perfect mix of single and multiplayer, *Modern Warfare* raised the bar for the genre – so high others have struggled to cope.

world in the shape of *Duke Nukem 3D*. We asked Scott Miller just why it was such an important game, especially in the face of stiff competition like *Quake*. He gave us a list, handily: "First FPS to ship with its level editor. First FPS with a character that had a personality and talked. First FPS set in realistic earth locations, grounding the game with a sense of place. First FPS with truly inventive weapons. First FPS with humour. First FPS with interactive environments. First FPS with its own scripting language, accessible by players. So, I think *Duke Nukem 3D* was a groundbreaking game; anyone who played it back in its day really understood its importance."

Up to this point, an FPS on console was something of an aberration, controlling poorly and generally just not fitting the system. In 1997 the British studio Rare decided to get James Bond involved to change all of that. As Karl Hilton, now of Crytek UK, tells us: "Initially we weren't sure if we could do full freedom of movement so we looked at 'gun games' such as *Virtua Cop* and *Time Crisis*. As soon as the decision to go full FPS was made we played a lot of *Doom* Deathmatch."

Once again the influence of *Doom* was felt, and from it came the inspiration for *GoldenEye 007* – one of the N64's best games and a flagship title for Rare. But this bold step into the great unknown paved the way for the likes of *Halo* and *TimeSplitters* to make the consoles they were on their own, and *GoldenEye* is still adored.

The first-person shooter is a genre of me-toos – not something specific to the genre, of course, but with its popularity and visibility it's easier to see just how many ideas are… 'borrowed', shall we say, from other games that do well. The Second World War influx of the early 21st Century is an obvious one, as is the switch to modern combat with the release of *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*.

THE BIG INTERVIEW

Valve's Marc Laidlaw revisits one the genre's best



Plans for *Half-Life* changed partway through development. Why?
Valve's plans for the game were fairly ambitious by the time I joined up, with Gabe talking about the possibilities for in-game cinematic sequences, but at some point we stepped back and took a look at what we had roughed out. It was sobering. We realised that we were nowhere near delivering what people expected of us. We felt keenly that we couldn't build another game that was largely corridors with monster closets. Games like *Unreal* and *SIN* were scary competitors, and we decided that if we were to stand a chance of standing out, we had better improve our process and reinvent our game. So a bunch of us closeted ourselves (the origin of the infamous 'cabal') and redesigned the game from scratch. It incorporated huge chunks of what we had already built, but we thought through every inch of the game in great detail, as a group, rather than simply assigning levels to level designers and letting them work in isolation.

***Half-Life 2* has enduring popularity – why do you think that is?**
I'm not sure why it has outlived the technology that gave rise to it. I find it hard to revisit personally. As with many games, it looks beautiful in my mind and memory… but every time I actually see it, I wince a little bit. Fondly, but I wince. I guess that part of what gave it lasting appeal are some things we did deliberately, to make sure that even when the game ends, there are questions that linger, mysteries that keep you wondering.

What was your first FPS?
Doom made me seasick, *Quake* didn't yet exist, so my first FPS was Raven's *Heretic*. It was *Doom* with a fantasy wrapper, but the nightmarish world really grabbed me and still remains a place that is weirdly real in my memory. I was thoroughly sick of fantasy at the time I encountered it. I had no desire to read another book or see a movie with these genre trappings… but the game got past all my cynical defences.



» [PC] It seems quaint these days, but the original *Half-Life* was a giant step forward for the genre.

But one game that might surprise you to know initially started out as a bit of a me-too was the original *Half-Life*, released in 1998. Yes, one of the most influential and genre-altering games ever released was initially planned to ride on the coattails of another set of games. Valve's Marc Laidlaw explains: "It was originally intended to be more in the vein of *Quake*, its immediate forebear, although the setting was of course more reminiscent of *Doom*. The level designers all cut their teeth on *Doom* and *Duke Nukem 3D*, and when it came to designing an engaging interactive experience, with opportunities for emergent mayhem, *Duke* was frequently mentioned."

One major shift brought about by *Half-Life* was a step towards more cinematic presentation and a more story-focused approach to how the FPS was made. There were still games riddled with monster closets popping up, but there was a distinct step away from what had come before – fewer mazes, less pace, a lack of puzzles, ▶



» [PS2] Sidestepping all expectations, id followed up its brilliant first two *Quake* games with an online, arena-based shooter. Hugely ahead of its time.



» [PC] A phenomenal technical achievement at the time of its release, the original *Unreal* doesn't quite retain the same stature as its contemporaries.



LEFT 4 DEAD
■ Turtle Rock Studios took multiplayer gaming in an exciting new direction, proving killing zombies is even more fun with friends.

2008 — 2009 — 2010 — 2012 — 2013 — 2014

BORDERLANDS
■ Gearbox Software took the *Diablo* template and applied it to a first-person shooter. It's nowhere near as crazy as it sounds.

CALL OF JUAREZ: GUNSLINGER
■ Although it's not the first game in the series, this cowboy-themed FPS delivered a truly engaging story that constantly messed with the player's perception.

TITANFALL
■ Respawn Entertainment's first game reinvigorated the genre, delivering great game mechanics and gigantic mechs.



Bluffer's guide

WHAT MAKES A GREAT FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER?

The best loadout for creating a mind-blowing FPS

BAD BASTARDS

■ If you have no interest in what you're shooting, you might as well be firing at tin cans. Memorable enemies, like pig cops, are important.

AN IDENTITY OF ITS OWN

■ We see too many identikit shooters out there – the ones we remember are, unsurprisingly enough, the ones that stand out.

TAKING IT WORLDWIDE

■ Single-player FPS titles can survive and thrive, but the closest we get to classic fast-paced action these days is via online multiplayer.

GOD BLESS MOUSELOOK

■ Console shooters were hamstrung for years and it took the PC a while to adopt a standard – tight controls are incredibly important.

MAXIMUM FIREPOWER

■ Memorable weapons, like *Doom*'s BFG and *Turok 2*'s Cerebral Bore, make the experience that bit more satisfying than it otherwise would be.

SOMETHING TO DO

■ They're mocked in *Call Of Duty* ('follow the man' missions), but objectives are important. They drive you on, forcing you into yet another battle.

more storyline focus – it took the momentum gathered from titles like *System Shock* and *Terminator: Future Shock* and propelled the genre in a bold new direction.

It was a direction, however, that surprised some. John Romero, for example, didn't see changes like those in *Half-Life* and later games coming: "I thought that FPS games would continue to be fast. I thought they would continue to feature maps chock full of exploration and depth. I never foresaw cover systems taking the place of skilful movement."

This lack of pace was a more considered choice in the case of *System Shock 2* and *Deus Ex*, which arrived in 1999 and 2000 respectively. Both games are seen as the be-all, end-all titles of the FPS/RPG hybrids, and Warren Spector is understandably proud of his game and the respect it has garnered over the years: "Maybe I'm flattering myself and the *Deus Ex* team, but since that game came out Choice and Consequence have become buzzwords and I've seen number of games since its release that exploit some of the gameplay ideas we were trying to express. If influence qualifies as importance, *Deus Ex* is the one."

When 2004 finally rolled around, Valve got about to releasing a little ditty called *Half-Life 2*. What do people think of that game? We asked John, considered to be one of the fathers of the entire genre and a man whose opinion is one to be listened to: "*Half-Life 2* is just the most amazing FPS I've ever played."

Refining everything that made the original so great, *Half-Life 2* is a study in excellence in game design – every aspect of it just works, every element of the story, from the dialogue to the little looks shot at the player, is near-enough perfect. It's ten years old and still it hasn't been bettered. That's not an overstatement: it's just the way things are.

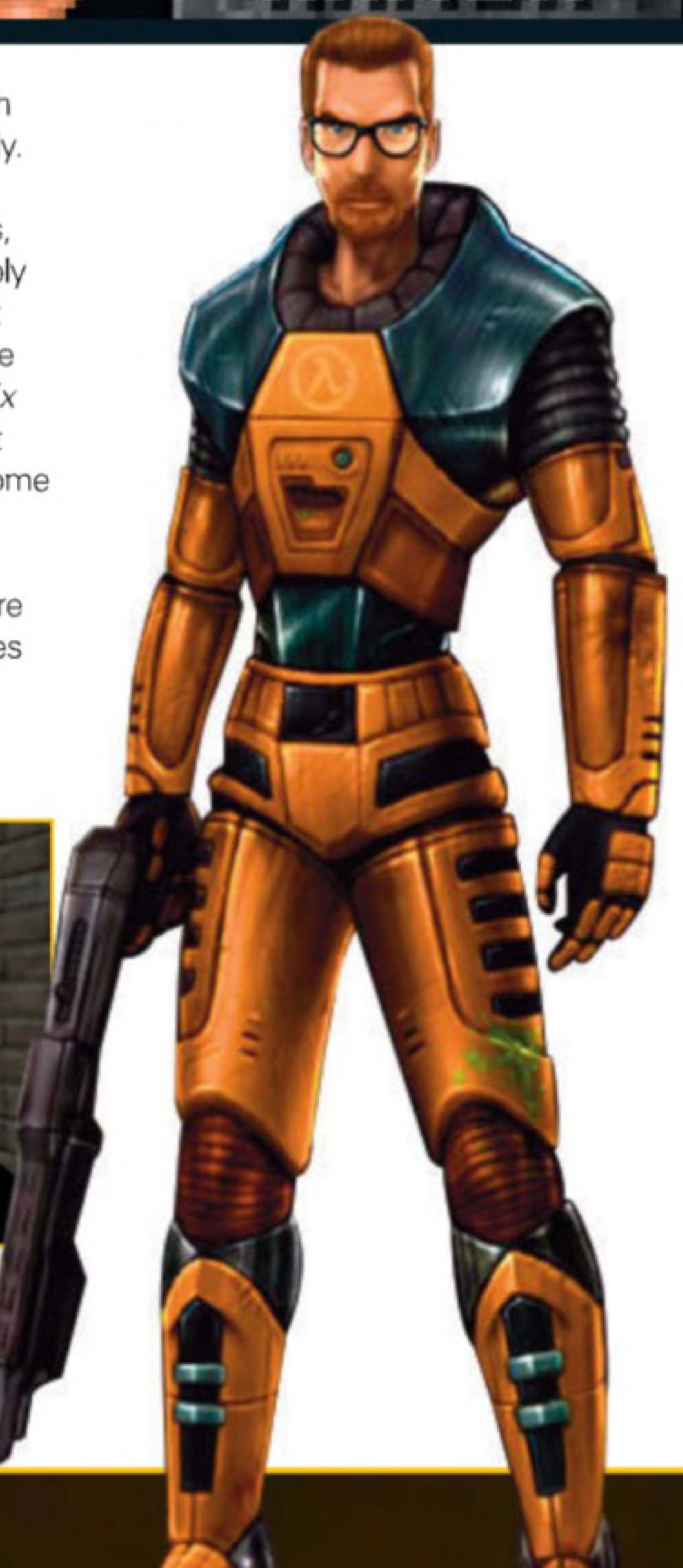
But progress didn't stop entirely, and *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* released back in 2007 to a considerable amount of fanfare. It just wasn't apparent until months later just what sort of impact it would have on the genre. There can be no question that it has changed not just the FPS genre, but gaming as a whole – in similar ways to how *Half-Life*, *Quake* and *Doom* did before it.



» [N64] *GoldenEye* changed the opinions of many a person who thought there was no space for the FPS on console.



» [PC] Tactical shooters existed before and it's been bettered since, but the original *Rainbow Six* is still a memorable game.




» [Xbox] If ever there was a game associated entirely with a console, it's *Halo*.

"I think it's really critical that the games industry doesn't get complacent or lazy with the genre"
Karl Hilton

One important way George Broussard sees the change is through the simplification of online play: "You cannot compete with the ease of getting in and out of a console FPS and having a social experience. People often forget how bad that experience was on PC for the normal person. There's a reason that *Call Of Duty* sells 20 million units a game. Console ease of play."

This modern take on the first-person shooter has moved away from emergent, exploratory, open play though – and *Deus Ex*, *Thief* and *System Shock* creator Warren Spector knows why: "With costs as high as they are, teams as big as they are and risks as great as they are, you can't really blame publishers and developers for playing it safe, delivering conventional games with prettier graphics. If you want innovation these days, you kind of have to look to the indie scene. At least we *have* an indie scene now – five or ten years ago that wasn't the case."

But that doesn't necessarily mean he's happy with how things are: "It's sure become boring. It seems like everyone just recycling old ideas. The only thing that interests me these days is the trend over the last five or ten years of transforming the genre into a sport. The way multiplayer FPSs play, you really have to look at sport as the model, not games per se."

And a sport it is, in many places, with *Call Of Duty* tournaments spanning the world and bringing in thousands in prize money for those adept at slaying each other in online battles. Fortunately we offline players weren't forgotten about, and a spiritual successor to *System Shock 2* also hit in 2007 in the shape of *BioShock*.

While less complex than its forebear, *BioShock* showed the money men that there was still life in the single-player experience, and that players could enjoy themselves without being patronised by an overly simple experience. Did it save the FPS? No, that's a silly statement. But it kept the blood pumping in an area that could have died off.

The first-person shooter is a genre with a rich history and, by the looks of things, an even richer future. Karl Hilton agrees: "With the advent of higher resolution displays and VR technology like Oculus Rift and Morpheus, the opportunity to immerse gamers in these worlds and make them even more believable is only going to increase. Having said that, I think it's really critical that the games industry doesn't get complacent or lazy with the genre. We need to be looking for new FPS experiences whether that's more freedom within the game environments, more varied realistic or fantasy worlds to play in and crucially more to do than just shooting/powering up/powering down/blowing up 'things'. People will get bored if you don't offer something new regularly."

But the future of the FPS isn't just forward-looking, with recent years seeing a comeback of sorts – developers brought up on the shooters of the early-to-mid Nineties making games of their own; intentional throwbacks to the titles they were raised on, that they see as classics of the genre. Or even how the genre *should* be.

Shadow Warrior, Rise Of The Triad, Serious Sam, Bulletstorm – the list goes on. While made with modern tech and running on modern machines, these games all bring back an attitude – an irreverence, almost – that made the golden age of shooters just that. Rather than multi-million dollar Michael Bay simulators, these games simply put having a good time at the top of the list.

And Scott Miller sees this return of the intentionally old-school shooters as a very good thing for gamers: "It's definitely on the way back. Games have gotten so complicated that there's a clear market for old-school simplified gaming to make a return. I, for one, love Nineties-style gaming with modern graphics and tech.

But I also love modern games, too. There's room for both." *


» [Xbox 360] *System Shock*'s spiritual successor, *BioShock* brought thoughtful action back to the FPS genre.

HAVE YOU SEEN THESE GAMES? The greatest games that went off the grid



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

No One Lives Forever was *Austin Powers* in game form, except funnier. Confusion over who owns the rights means we haven't seen a new game since 2002.



QUAKE

Quake 4 was palmed off to Raven Software in 2005, and since then the series appears to have been forgotten by id Software. It's a sad fate for a truly legendary series of games.



HERETIC

We saw *Hexen*, while *Heretic 2* arrived in 1998, but since then this fantasy take on what *Doom* established has been silent. Annoying, as its (limited) depth added a lot to the experience.



JEDI KNIGHT

The glaring problem with the disappearance of the *Jedi Knight* series is that it was *excellent*. Inventive and ahead of its time, there's unfortunately little chance that Disney will go back to it.



STRIFE

John Romero says: "The most overlooked FPS has got to be *STRIFE*. It's an excellent mix of FPS action and RPG storytelling. Seriously, find a copy and play it. You will *love* the game."



SWAT

With the downscaling of Irrational Games and a focus on narrative-driven, downloadable games, there's little chance of a *SWAT 5* ever appearing. *Rainbow Six: Siege* might fill the gap, mind.



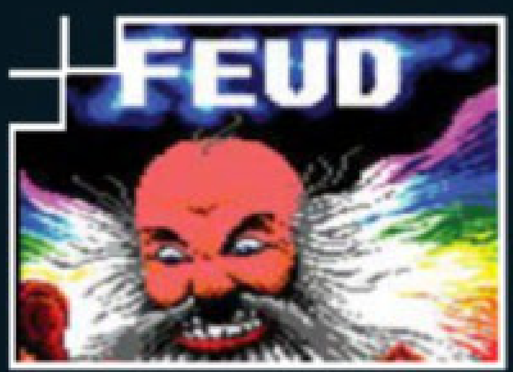
HALF-LIFE 3

Remember how there was initially going to be a total of three Episodes coming after *Half-Life 2*? We only got two of them. The third – or *Half-Life 3* – has been relegated to myth.



FEUD

Duelling wizards, herb collecting, maddening mazes and deadly spells. Darran Jones asks the Pickford bros how they created one of their most entertaining games



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** BULLDOG SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** BINARY DESIGN
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

David Braben and Ian Bell's critically acclaimed *Elite* celebrates its 30th anniversary later this year. Originally released in 1984 it instantly struck a chord, not only with gamers, but also other developers, as John Pickford recalls…

"I remember constantly getting into situations where my ship was almost dead and there was a single enemy left in the area and I was absolutely determined to finish him off. Even if it meant my own destruction… It struck me as quite a unique emotion and I wondered if I could design a game purely around that feeling."

That *feeling* John experienced led to one of the brothers' most popular games – a game that, even today, remains refreshingly different to play. *Feud* tells the story of two warring wizard brothers, Learic and Leanoric, who finally decide that their village isn't big enough to house both of them and settle their differences by flinging a variety of dangerous spells at each other until only one of them survives. We were keen to know if it was a case of life imitating art…

"Haha, yeah, definitely," laughs Ste, the younger of the Pickfords. "We grew up in a small two bedroom terrace house and had to share a tiny bedroom – basically the size of a box room – with bunk beds in, so we were on top of each other as teenagers growing up, without any space of our own. We were always arguing at home. At work we were fine though, and always got on quite well I seem to remember."

The work partnership worked well indeed, and after a brief stint of freelance work on projects such as *Ghost Town* and *Ziggurat*, the brothers found themselves working at Binary Design where they contributed to a number of games, as well as creating *Glider Rider*, *Zub* and *Amaurote*. It's *Feud*, though, that the brothers see as one of their earliest important titlesgames, partly because it represented a new way of creating games for them.

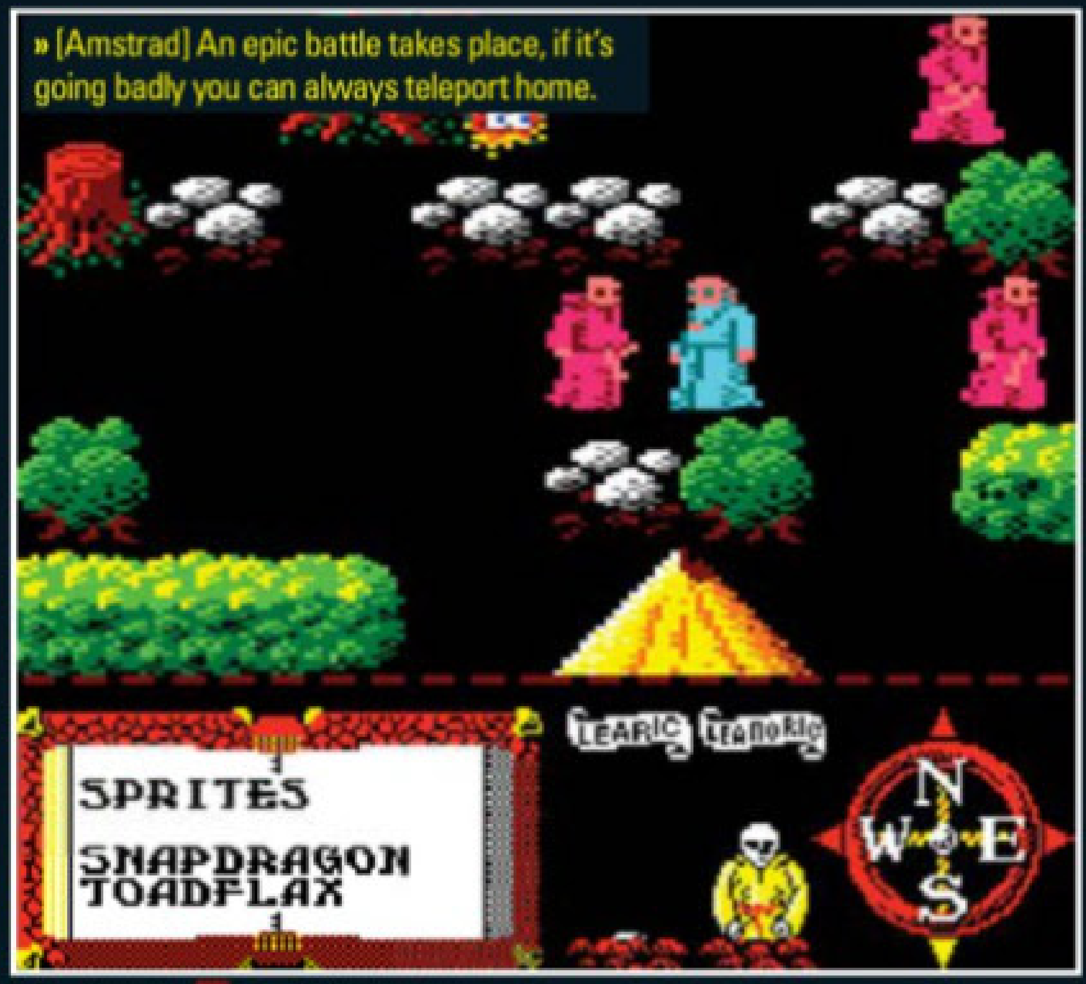
"*Feud* was the first game design we ever sold," explains Ste. "Game projects were generally given to the development team to make with either a title, a licence, or a one-sentence brief (a hang gliding game, a space battle game, etc) and designing the game wasn't seen as a separate job, it was something that the programmers, or the programmer and artist, would work out between themselves as part of their planning. The idea of a game design document or a game designer, separate from the development team, didn't really exist back then. Although it probably



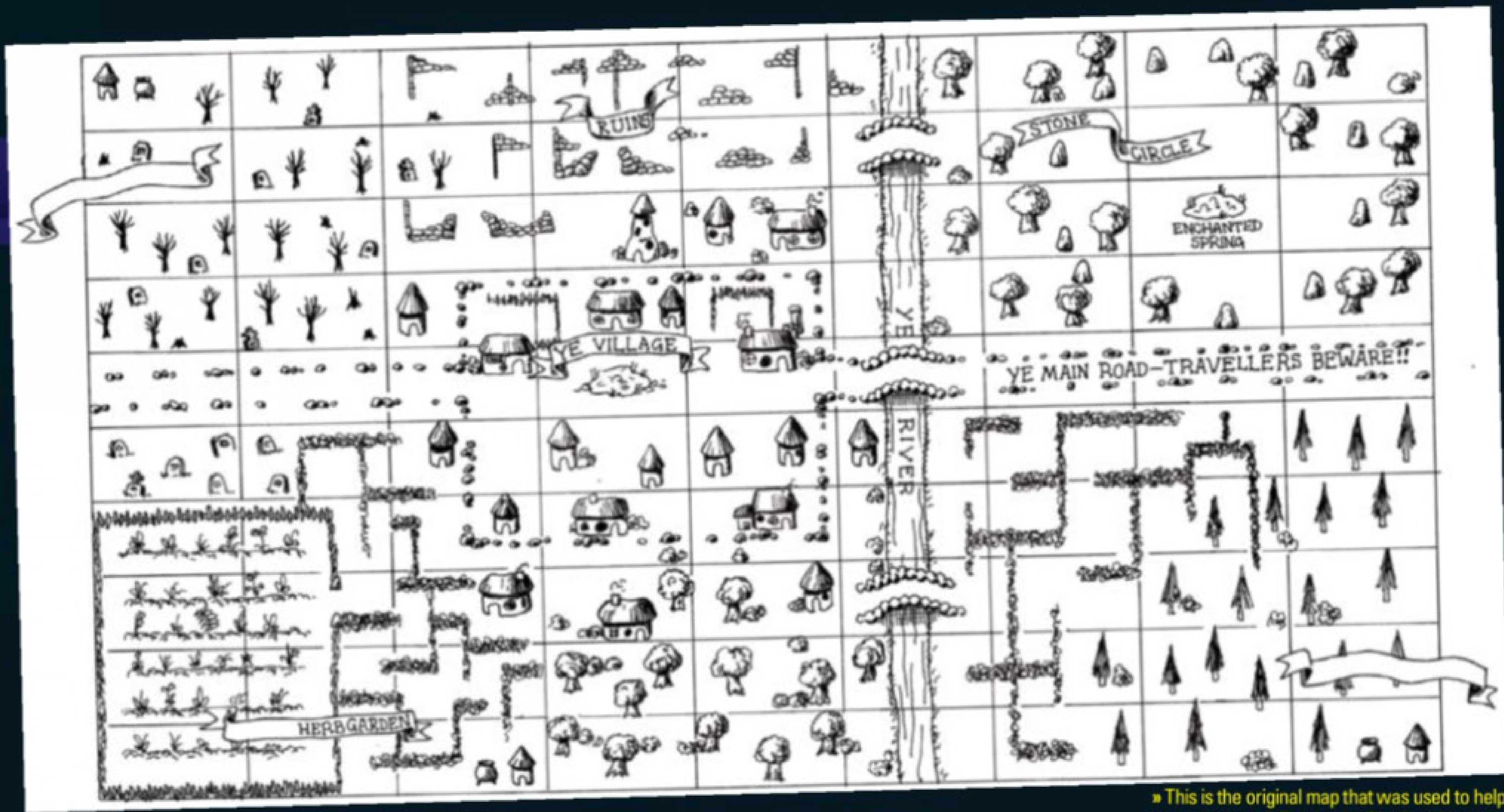
» [C64] It looks nice enough but the C64 version has some irritating issues.



» [Amstrad] Old Hieke the herbkeeper is named after Andy Hieke, the boss of Binary Design.



» [Amstrad] An epic battle takes place, if it's going badly you can always teleport home.



» This is the original map that was used to help sell *Feud* to the Pickfords' bosses.

happened simultaneously at other studios around the world, at Binary we had to invent the concept of a game designer, and of a game design document, from scratch, and there was some resistance."

It was a big step for the brothers at the time, with Ste calling the decision to pass the game over for another team to programme "unprecedented". John had the challenge of imparting the ideas for *Feud* that were in his head to a group of coders, while working on his own game. Despite certain difficulties, particularly with the C64 version of the game, the Pickfords relished this new way of working, with John being particularly fascinated about designing a game for other people to code. "That was great," he recalls. "The team (at least on the Z80 side) did a cracking job with it so it was really fascinating to see a game I'd designed take shape."

Commodore 64 version aside, *Feud* is a cracking game, mainly because everything about it feels so tight and well made. The village the two brothers live in is a relatively large playing area consisting of a number of interconnected screens that contain a herb garden, stone circle, graveyard and forest. It's a wraparound map as well, allowing for potential shortcuts when you start to cotton on to where the best herbs are hidden. As the map plays such an important part in the game, we were keen to know if it had been created storyboard-style before work on *Feud* had even begun.

"Yeah, the area map was designed as part of the game design," confirms Ste, "before development began. It was part of the game design that we were pitching to the studio boss. This was really unusual for us at the time. Usually any design work didn't start until development of the game began, and even then it was rare for us to map something so large on paper rather than just make screens within the game or within a game-specific editor. I've still got the original paper version of the map here somewhere!"

The well-designed map and cartoon-like visuals made *Feud* feel alive, a feeling made more tangible by the ever-knowing presence that an equally skilled ▶

TOIL AND TROUBLE

Ste Pickford explains where the C64 version went wrong

"Haha, that's a long story," laughs Ste when we asked him why the C64 outing was so much weaker than its peers. "John didn't just design the game, but designed how it should be programmed, with ideas for how the AI should work, how they should prioritise different targets on the map, how they navigate the map, etc. He worked with the Spectrum and Amstrad programmer. The Commodore programmer wasn't interested though.

"John wasn't in a management position. The fact that we'd sold a game idea to our employers was a novel situation, and there were no official supervisory roles in place. John's official job was lead programmer on *Zub* (or *Amaurote*?) at the time, and was directing *Feud* in an unofficial capacity. The Commodore programmer wasn't obliged to follow his instructions, and he chose to make the game his way. He didn't actually store an internal map of the world, and didn't use my map data (which contained the position of all the trees, bushes, etc), and instead just made up his own positions in whichever way he thought looked nice. When it came to programming the enemy wizard, the way he'd gone about it meant there was no way to track its position in the world, as there was no world as such on the C64. So instead he just randomly decided to make the enemy wizard appear on a random edge of the screen every now and again, and move about randomly!"

HIEKE'S HERB GARDEN

The herbs of Feud and what you can make with them



SPELLS

HEAL
■ Restore precious energy to stay in the fight

TELEPORT
■ Need to get home in a hurry? Then this spell is for you

PROTECT
■ Laugh in Leanoric's face with this useful defence spell

SPRITES
■ A useful attack spell that homes in on your brother

ZOMBIE
■ Turn a villager into a useful undead servant

SWIFT
■ A useful burst of speed, but with a limited use

FREEZE
■ A great way to slow down herb keeper Hieke

DOPPLEGANGER
■ Create multiple copies of yourself to astound and confuse

INVISIBLE
■ Escape your brother's evil gaze

REVERSE
■ It causes you more problems than your brother

FIREBALL
■ A high damage spell that really hurts

LIGHTNING
■ Hard to fire, but punishing when they actually hit



» [ZX Spectrum] The compass always points to where your brother is. Unless you're playing the C64 version…



» [ZX Spectrum] It's terrifying when you encounter your brother as you've no idea what spells he has access to.

▶ wizard was out there somewhere gathering the herbs he needed to bury you forever. Long before you could craft items in the likes of *Monster Hunter* and *Skyrim*, *Feud* enabled you to create spells by combining herbs and other items together. Once collected, you had to head back to your cooking pot and mix the herbs together to create your spells. Want to freeze your opponent? Then you're going to need Bind Weed and Bog Weed. Need to heal yourself? Then Balm and Feverfew will ease your pain. It's a fantastic concept that felt refreshingly new in 1987. "I remember writing out long lists of herbs, but I don't recall where I got them from," admits John when we ask how the brothers went about selecting the relevant herbs for each spell. "It was pre-internet so I guess I must have got a book from the library."

But why were the warring brothers wizards? Surely space men or cowboys would have made for cooler adversaries? "I've no idea!" laughs John. "I think it probably just fitted well with the idea of a destructive feud between two characters. Casting spells by collecting ingredients just seemed a perfect fit."

Ultimately it was the right fit, helping *Feud* stand apart from many other games of the time. Equally fresh for the time was *Feud*'s core concept of attempting to kill your opponent while they're trying to do the same to you. There's a real cat-and-mouse element to the Pickfords' game, which only gets tenser when you see the flickering compass points that betray the direction of your brother.

> **"We invented the AI bot deathmatch you know! Nobody believes us"**
>
> Ste Pickford on Feud's claim to fame

In fact you could argue that *Feud* is one of the earliest examples of the deathmatches that became so popular with the rise of first-person shooters. Were the brothers aware that they'd created one of the earliest examples? "At the time no," laughs Ste, "but later on we did realise, and we've been banging on about it ever since. 'We invented the AI bot deathmatch, you know!' Nobody believes us."

People may be sceptical about the brothers' contribution to the creation of the deathmatch but there's no denying that the pair stumbled upon something special when John thought up the idea of *Feud*. "I think it was really just luck and a testament to the team that it turned out so well," admits John. "Games were made very quickly back then and there really wasn't much of a concept of playtesting and tweaking gameplay. It was 'get the game done with as few bugs as possible and send it off to the publisher'. Any good games that came from that system were possibly accidental and most likely already in the publisher's bad books due to being late."

The brothers certainly weren't in any bad books with *Feud* however, and it was chosen to launch on Bulldog Software alongside the slightly less impressive *Colony*. Bulldog Software was a new sub-label of Mastertronic, featuring an image of the iconic British canine on its cover and a flashy red, white and blue stripe. Despite being used to launch a new label, Ste recalls no pressure from Mastertronic at the time. "They may have even chosen to put *Feud* on the Bulldog label *because* it was turning out pretty well, rather than the other way around," he explains. "We weren't that close to the publishing side though, so I can't be sure. The games we made at Binary Design were all made in the same way, with the same budget, same teams, same deadlines, whether they were budget or full-price releases. John and I definitely wanted to make a high-quality game, as this was our baby, but there wasn't necessarily any extra pressure from management or client."

***Feud* launched in 1987 and immediately proved popular on the Spectrum and Amstrad, scoring a** *Crash* Smash. It certainly struck a chord with gamers, shifting over 191,000 units across all systems, also appearing on the Atari 8-bit, Commodore 64, MSX and, eventually, the Commodore Amiga and PC. While we feel the Amstrad version is the best one (something Ste also agrees with) the Spectrum and MSX outings also impressed.

Interestingly, there were a number of different loading screens creating for the game as well, all by Ste. Was there any reason he did so many? "I was feeling arty!" he laughs. "I really wanted to do something special with the loading screens, as I was proud of the game. I pretentiously made the Amstrad screen square, as I didn't think I should be restricted by the arbitrary size of a computer screen [laughs]. I suppose I was aiming for something like a classic album cover. I was trying to capture the mood and feel of the game, rather than just duplicate the cover in pixels (we never saw the covers until after release anyway – and they were always rubbish with Mastertronic!). The Amstrad one was my 'real' design, but I'd used loads of colours, and I knew that wouldn't look great on the Spectrum, so I put the extra effort in to design a completely different loading screen that was more suited to the Spectrum screen, with more pixelly stipple, and less colour."

Considering the brothers have so much fondness for the game, it's perhaps surprise that a sequel has never appeared in the 27 years since its release. Worry not, for while a sequel isn't likely just yet, it certainly hasn't been forgotten. "We'd love to revisit the core ideas," admits Ste, "but if we ever did something like a sequel or a remake it would be quite different. We had one idea a few years back that would be based on interlocking gardens with multiple players, and perhaps even a dynamically changing world, but it was ambitious and a bit beyond our resources at the moment."

A sequel might not be appearing any time soon, but the original remains fantastic fun to play and the brothers remain proud of their achievement. "There were so many games back then that really didn't work at all," concludes Ste, "and barely functioned properly as a game. I think *Feud* was a proper game that was worth playing and was entertaining." *

Find out more about the Pickfords by visiting www.zee-3.com



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GLIDER RIDER
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

ZUB (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

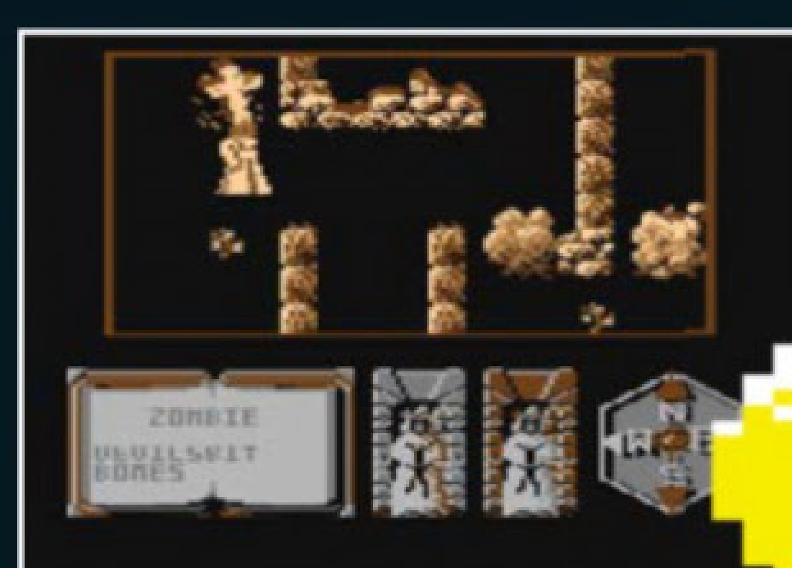
AMAUROTE
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987



» [Amstrad] Lightning bolts are devastating… if they hit you.



» [Amstrad] When the game ends you'll get a percentage based on how much damage you inflicted.



» [Atari 8-bit] This is an interesting port, featuring the Amstrad's chunky sprites, but a muted colour palette.

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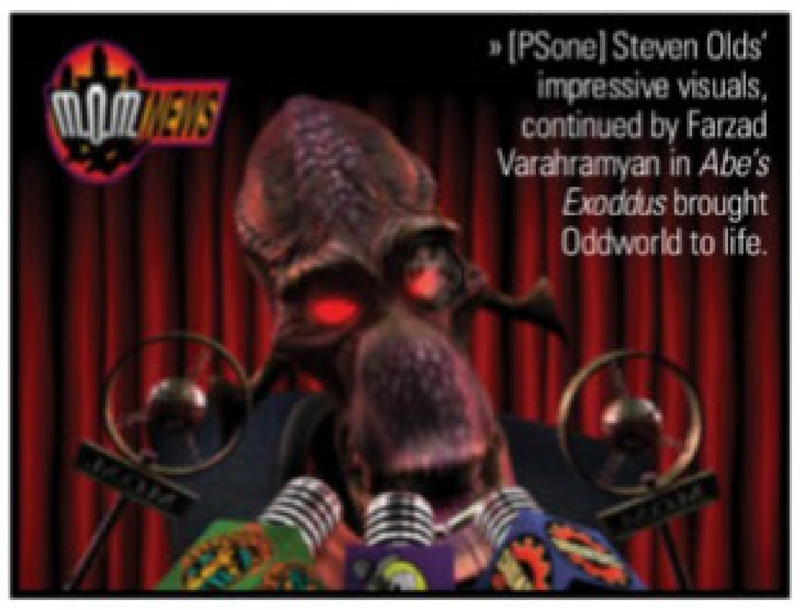
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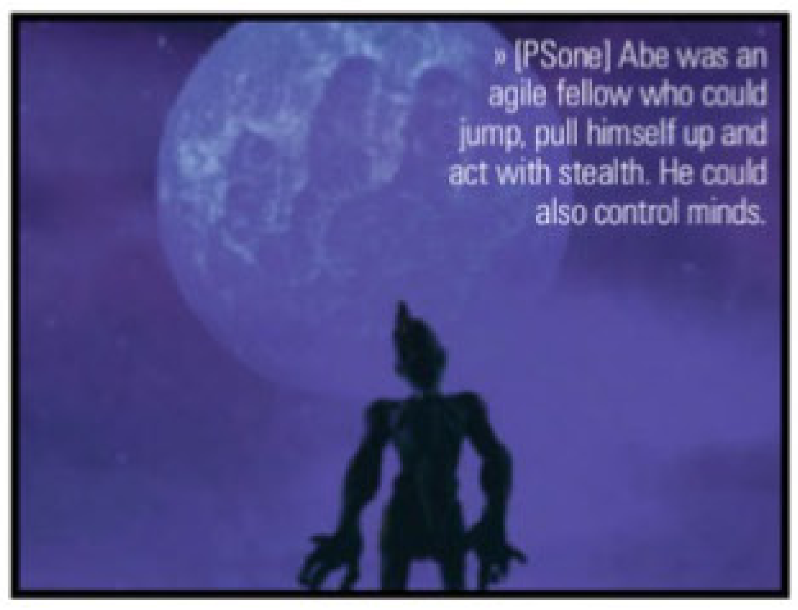
AN ODDWORLD INHABITANTS RETROSPECTIVE





When Abe introduced himself in the opening sequence of the first Oddworld game, he was also heralding the launch of a new gaming studio: one that, as David Crookes discovers, wanted to change the way we see the real world


» [PSone] Steven Olds' impressive visuals, continued by Farzad Varahramyan in *Abe's Exoddus* brought Oddworld to life.


» [PSone] Abe was an agile fellow who could jump, pull himself up and act with stealth. He could also control minds.


» [Xbox] Although *Munch's Oddysee* was the third game, it was actually the second instalment of a proposed quintology.

O*ddworld* is back – which is great news for fans of the series but less so for those who prefer their platform games to be rather light-hearted, easy to navigate and packed with cute characters. After all, floor-waxer Abe is a poor schmuck at the bottom of the food chain, an unlikely anti-hero whose story is one of capitalism against mysticism. It's as deep a game as you'll ever find – as the recent 2014 release of *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty* will attest.

But the desire for Oddworld Inhabitants co-founder Lorne Lanning to strip back the phony, glossy veneer of life in his games has always gone further than the titles themselves, infiltrating his entire company. Oddworld Inhabitants was less about setting up a games company producing anything and everything and more about promoting the new universe Lorne wanted to create. It had been a long-lasting desire too: Lorne's vision was formed in the early Nineties and it was quite advanced by the time he and his friend, Sherry McKenna, did the rounds at E3 in LA, telling all and sundry about their plan for a series of games.

"Lorne was talking about delivering a message to the world, a way of showing what we are doing wrong as humanity wrapped up in something fun and nutritious," says artist Farzad Varahramyan, who met Lorne that day. "Lorne shared his vision in such a manner that you wanted to be a part of it."

A few months later, in September 1994, Lorne and Sherry had formed a company called Oddworld Inhabitants. They began hiring people to work in a temporary office in Los Osos, California, a commuter town close to San Luis Obispo, looking for those with skill, motivation and drive. By January, work had started on what was being called *SoulStorm*. It was set to be Oddworld Inhabitants' debut game.

Among the hired workers was Farzad, the 11th person to join the company. He had received a phone call from Lorne who remembered their chat ten months earlier and Farzad became one of two people employed in production design, the other being Steven Olds, a hard-working production designer who Farzad found to be "without equal" and "unbelievably intimidating". He also found him highly educational and rewarding.

"Steven's artwork was so unique and skilful that it was – and still is – without compare," Farzad says. "When I walked through the doors of Oddworld Inhabitants, I knew immediately that I was in the presence of the mentors I was so desperately seeking. It quite simply blew my mind. The office comprised of a healthy number of people, young and old, women and men, experience and novices. But what we shared was the belief we were part of something great and meaningful."

The early meetings were rather scattershot. Although Lorne had ideas for the company and the game, they threatened to overwhelm him. "Lorne was full of ideas, and he was still working out the dimensions of what he wanted to do," says Paul O'Connor, who was hired to work on *SoulStorm*'s game design. "He was trying to build a ▶

IN THE KNOW

■ Sherry McKenna was a well-recognised Hollywood producer. She had 75 awards and had appeared on HBO behind-the-scenes specials. Lorne Lanning met her at Hollywood effects studio Rhythm And Hues.

■ Lorne was inspired by Gene Roddenbery, Jim Henson and Walt Disney to create a persistent cast of characters.

■ Oddworld Inhabitants was founded in 1994. The first game, *Abe's Oddysee*, made its debut three years later.

■ Right from the start Oddworld Inhabitants envisaged a growing universe that would foster a loyal community of fans.

■ Farzad Varahramyan and Steven Olds visually created the vast number of characters in the *Oddworld* universe.

■ Oddworld's fan liaison since 1999 has been the cheeky and sarcastic Alf, named after UK fan Alfred Gamble.

■ Oddworld has a reputation of announcing games and films that never get completed. They include: *Squeek's Oddysee*, *SligStorm*, *The Hand Of Odd*, *The Brutal Ballad Of Fangus Klot*, *Citizen Siege* and *Slave Circus*.

■ Disillusionment with the gaming industry and publishers in particular forced Oddworld Inhabitants out of gaming following the release of *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* in 2005.

■ A deal with UK-based Just Add Water has revitalised the franchise.

MAKING NOISES

Lorne Lanning would work closely with the design, art and programming team at Oddworld Inhabitants but he got stuck in in other ways, not least with the voice acting, which he proved to have a particular talent for. The company had a small recording studio in which Lorne would get very excited, recording the various voices such as "Follow Me", "Stay Here" and the whistles and other less savoury noises that would emanate from the characters.



"I worked with Lorne in recording the character voices and in putting them in animatics for the cutscenes," says Chris. "Lorne would drop into character anywhere, anytime. We got some strange looks when having story meetings over sushi."

The speech was one of the key components in the games' subsequent success, helping to lighten the mood while also providing much humour. Farzad Varahramyan was responsible for Abe being able to drink a Brew, pass wind, control the gas and detonate it wherever it was positioned – an idea that had been half-jokingly suggested.


» Concept art featuring the loyal Glukkon henchmen, the Sligs.



» Oddworld Inhabitants storyboarded the various aspects of the *Oddworld* games.



» [Xbox] *Munch's Oddysee* was an Xbox exclusive and it also marked a switch to the third dimension.

business, a world, a game, and a new approach to videogames all at the same time so he'd ping back and forth between big visions and little things."

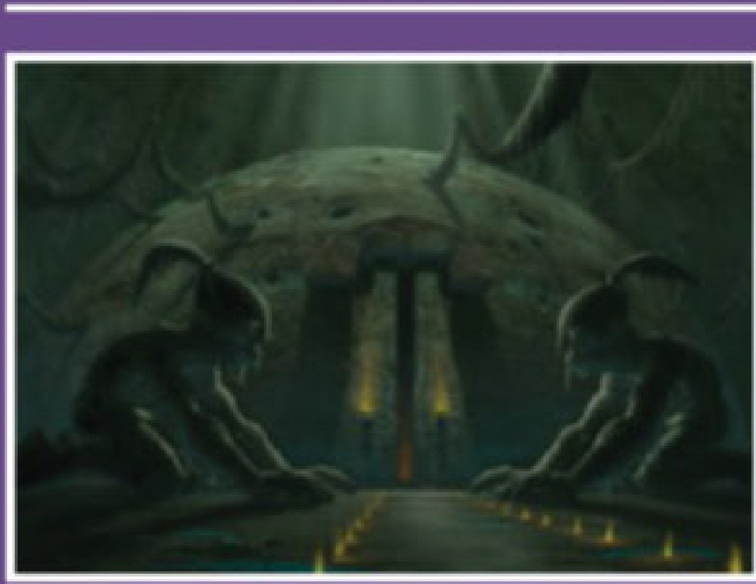
Those big visions included trying to instil a feeling that the game and the company were about a world dominated by religious oligarchs while looking at how the mechanics of the game itself would work out. The direction of the game and the company altered many times as a result. "Lots of things changed – the world, the characters, the aims of the game," says Paul. "A big early move was to shift the bad guys from being mullahs who oppressed monks to businessmen that exploited workers." The meetings were not always formal. "I'm sure we had plenty of meetings but Lorne's management was more organic – a design choice was as likely to spill out of an informal art review that I'd overhear from my desk than it was to come out of some formal sit-down and frankly I don't remember a lot of those," he continues.

As worked progressed, more people were taken on. Just nine months into production. Lorne and Sherry decided it was time to move offices to accommodate them, hiring premises in downtown San Luis Obispo, an old, sizeable city midway between LA and San Francisco. "Walking into this Oddworld office was like ascending the staircase to some kind of artistic Valhalla," says scriptwriter Chris Ulm. "The office was awesome – black bookcases, pool table, big window, lots and lots of black pinboards filled with amazing sketches. Artwork was everywhere – the work of Steven and Farzad unleashed itself on you as soon as you opened the door."

In some ways, Lorne and Sherry were creating their own office-based *Oddworld*. It was a fantasy environment, influenced by *Flashback*, *Out Of This World* and *Myst*. It also worked in a different way to most gaming companies. Lorne and Sherry had a background in film and met at the Hollywood effects studio Rhythm And Hues. "We would approach the game in the same way as you would approach an effects film, starting with a script then putting an additional layer of game mechanics over the top that you know you'd want to implement or evolve upon," says Lorne.

The game's visuals were important to the team. *SoulStorm* had cinematic cutscenes and a 2D style, putting it quite at odds with the trend for 3D PlayStation

DEFINING GAMES



Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee

(PlayStation)

Introducing Abe for the first time, this debut game redefined expectations of a platform game and it was the first realisation of Oddworld Inhabitants' dream of delivering a political message within the wrappings of an accessible – albeit damn hard – game. Abe was a Christ-like character, helping to free his fellow Mudokons in the face of the Sligs that roamed Rupture Farms. It was about staying alive and solving puzzles and while it had its fans it also had its detractors, not least an exec at publisher GT Interactive who tried to halt production because it wasn't to his taste.



Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus

(PlayStation)

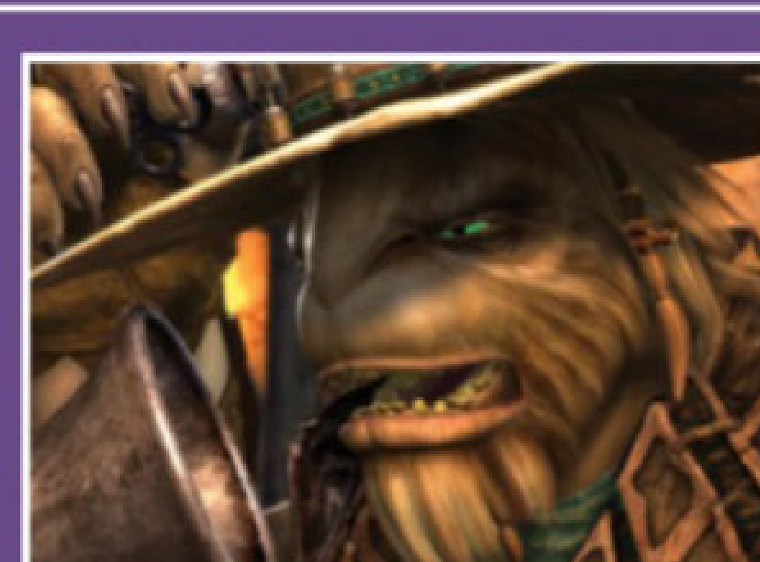
The 1998 sequel was a way of satiating the appetite of gamers until the next instalment of the planned quintology was released on the next-gen consoles. Twice as big and completed in 11 months, it was nevertheless an easier game for the developer to make because it had a better idea of the kind of game it was making. It was able to turn and burn on *Exoddus*, revisiting aspects that wouldn't work in the first game. It continued the story of Abe and was pretty much more of the same – although the Mudokons had a taste for SoulStorm Brew which caused its own problems.



Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee

(Xbox)

Out went 2D and in came 2D. But out, too, went any chance of this game being made for the PlayStation 2. Oddworld Inhabitants couldn't work with Sony's machine. It decided to go Xbox-only and centred the attention on Munch in what was the official second instalment of the quintology. Munch was even weirder than Abe but both were in the game. The player had to draw on both their strengths in order to resolve the puzzles, which, it has to be said, were not as varied as before. Still, the game was less intense than previous instalments and it had a more forgiving nature.



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

(Xbox)

Some, including Lorne, would say this was the best *Oddworld* game of all but it started in a very different manner, taking on the Old West with bounty hunter Stranger looking to bag some *Oddworld* hoodlums. It was less of a straightforward puzzle/platformer than before by bringing elements of a first-person shooter into a third-person game, but it was certainly more difficult than *Munch's Oddysee* at times. The way it combined platforming with shooting gave it a more rounded feel. Alas it sold poorly and would be last brand new *Oddworld* game to be made… so far, at least.

gaming – the platform on which *SoulStorm* was set to make its name (only it wouldn't because Oddworld's Inhabitants' publisher GT Interactive, which came on board in 1996, suggested the game would be better named *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*). "Lorne had figured out how to create a game that was as visually stunning as the concept art that it was created from," says Farzad. "To me it made no difference, other than the experience you had on the screen."

Lorne's vision for the game and the company wasn't always easy to implement. Oddworld Inhabitants emphasised huge, original ideas that, in their early stages, appeared impossible to achieve technically. It led to rows. "Arguments occurred but not frequently," says Farzad. "Spirited discussion is needed from time to time to make sure the things that really matter are exposed. We all knew it was not personal, but from a shared desire to just make the game better. Once there was a thrown chair, but fortunately I was not in the vicinity, I just heard it."

With tales of bottles of water being thrown at somebody's head ("I can't remember the reason," says Chris) and with lots of banter, the culture was about being tough enough to stick it out and actually make something great. All the while Lorne's overriding vision remained intact. He would frequently bring up the subject of politics – "it was a hoot to talk politics with him," says Paul – and Lorne's enthusiasm, confidence and charisma helped to drive his staff forward. What struck those working at Oddworld Inhabitants more, though, was less Lorne's politics but "his abundant belief that *Oddworld* was going to be a new kind of game and company that was going to change the business and the world." It may be crass these days to compare anybody with a bit of passion and a "reality distortion field" to Steve Jobs but Lorne appears to be very close to the Apple founder in his make-up. "Jobs once said 'real artists ship' and that was kind of the vibe at Oddworld," says Chris.

"I'd leave about 9pm or 10pm every day and I was never the last guy out the door"

GAME DESIGNER PAUL O'CONNOR WORKED HARD

There was a boldness about Oddworld Inhabitants' decisions. It commissioned developer Saffire to produce a Game Boy version of *Abe's Oddysee*, which it called *Oddworld Adventures*, thereby taking the company's message to a more kid-friendly console. And in May 1997, *Abe's Oddysee* was shown in its own theatre behind closed doors at the third E3. Lorne believed the cinematic nature of the game would be perfect for such a showing and he believed the game could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with film. A few months later, the game was put on general release in much of the world on what Oddworld Inhabitants called Odd Friday. It ensured there was much marketing dollar behind it.

It was so successful that GT Interactive wanted a sequel and fast. In order to speed things up, Lorne asked Chris to co-script the game with him. "My previous background had come from the comic book and animation industry, so collaborating on a game script was a fun challenge," he says. By now there were 20 people on the team. It was a tight deadline: *Abe's Exoddus* was released 11 months after *Oddysee*. Created to satisfy the hunger of gamers while the company waited for the next generation of consoles to arrive, and with the working title *Abe Gets Boned And Brewed*, the company stuck to its principles. Once again, it worked collaboratively, ensuring all of its staff had a say in the final game.

With the small time frame of the second game, though, even more hard work was needed. There was twice the level of content of the first game using an engine that was literally bursting at the seams. "We scarcely saw the sun. In crunch, I'd leave about 9pm or 10pm every day and I was never the last guy out the door," says Paul. "*Oddworld* went like a blowtorch and I've never seen such relentless crunch in 30 years in the business. The remarkable thing is that this is what we wanted to do – we were very much a cadre of true believers."

And believe they did. Although not everyone was as interested in the political stance of the company and games as some, there were those who embraced it wholeheartedly. It was part and parcel of the company, it seems, the key element which made it tick. "I was 100 per cent onboard with the idealistic values behind Oddworld's games," says Chris, who had uprooted his life in Southern California and skipped off to the Central Coast with his fiancé. "I liked that these games made commentary on commercialism, corporations, addiction and exploitation while still retaining a sense of humour and wonder. We were trying to create 'nutritious content' as Sherry called it and in a world where most videogames were nothing ▶



» This concept drawing sketches the opening sequence of the game, a cinematic mini-movie that set up the series' premise.



» [Xbox] There was criticism that the puzzles of *Munch's Oddysee* lacked variety but it was otherwise well received.

TIMELINE

1992 LORNE LANNING AND SHERRY MCKENNA MEET WHILE WORKING ON A PROJECT FOR RENOWNED HOLLYWOOD EFFECTS STUDIO RHYTHM AND HUES.

1994 ODDWORLD INHABITANTS IS FOUNDED AFTER LORNE LANNING SECURES THE FUNDING FROM VENTURE CAPITALISTS.

1995 PRODUCTION BEGINS ON SOULSTORM.

1996 GT INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE BECOMES ODDWORLD'S PUBLISHER AND PARTNER. SOULSTORM IS RENAMED ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE.

1997 ODD FRIDAY! ABE'S ODDYSEE IS RELEASED FOR PLAYSTATION AND LATER FOR PC. PRODUCTION BEGINS ON ABE'S EXODDUS.

1998 ABE'S EXODDUS BECOMES THE FIRST VIDEOGAME TO BE NOMINATED FOR AN ACADEMY AWARD. IT RELEASES ON PLAYSTATION AND PC ACROSS MOST OF THE WORLD. ODDWORLD ADVENTURES APPEARS ON GAME BOY.

2000 ODDWORLD ADVENTURES 2 IS RELEASED. ODDWORLD INHABITANTS BECOMES A FIRST-PARTY DEVELOPER FOR MICROSOFT.

2001 ODDWORLD: MUNCH'S ODDYSEE IS RELEASED AS A LAUNCH TITLE FOR XBOX IN THE US AND A YEAR LATER IN EUROPE AND AUSTRALIA.

2003 ODDWORLD: MUNCH'S ODDYSEE RELEASED FOR GAME BOY ADVANCE.

2005 ODDWORLD STRANGER'S WRATH IS RELEASED ON XBOX. IT SHIPS IN THE US WITH A PRE-ORDER BONUS DVD CONTAINING ALL CUTSCENES FROM PREVIOUS ODDWORLD GAMES AS WELL AS UNSEEN PRODUCTION TESTS.

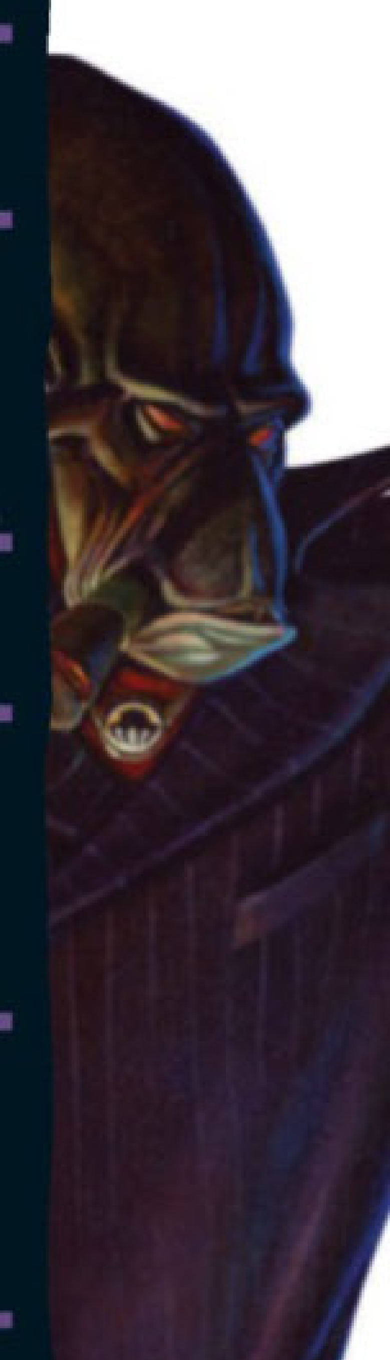
2008 ABE'S ODDYSEE AND ABE'S EXODDUS ARE RELEASED ON STEAM.

2009 LORNE LANNING AND JUST ADD WATER CEO STEWART GILRAY ARE INTRODUCED BY A MUTUAL FRIEND AT THE GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE. ABE'S ODDYSEE AND ABE'S EXODDUS ARE RELEASED AS PS ONE CLASSICS.

2010 A NEW ODDWORLD.COM WEBSITE IS LAUNCHED. PC PORTS OF MUNCH'S ODDYSEE AND STRANGER'S WRATH ARE RELEASED ON STEAM.

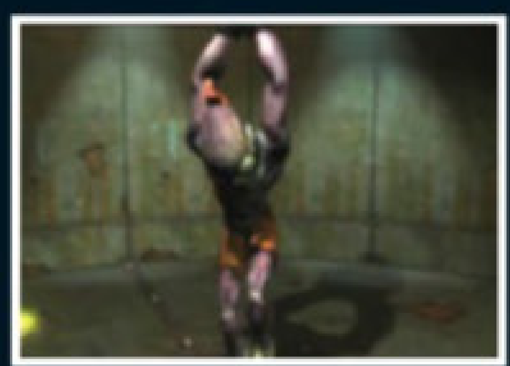
2010 STRANGER AND MUNCH COSTUMES FOR SACKBOY ARE RELEASED FOR LITTLEBIGPLANET 2. THE FIRST REMASTERED ODDWORLD GAME, ODDWORLD: STRANGER'S WRATH HD, IS ALSO RELEASED.

2014 ODDWORLD: NEW 'N' TASTY! RELEASED ACROSS PLATFORMS.

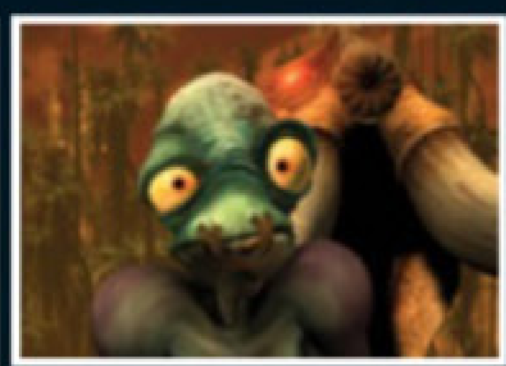




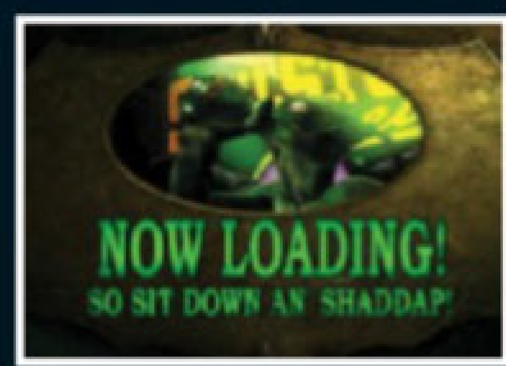
THE DNA OF... ODDWORLD INHABITANTS



Stark message
The *Oddworld* universe was inspired by the real-world conflicts between the natural world, indigenous cultures and civil rights versus corporate practices, irresponsible media and corrupt politics. It underpins everything Oddworld Inhabitants does.



Strong characters
Each of the *Oddworld* stories centres on a protagonist, be it Abe, Munch or Stranger. Abe is the most recognisable. Far from being a muscle-bound hero, he's still the messiah of his people, with the brains and common sense to deal with his extreme circumstances.



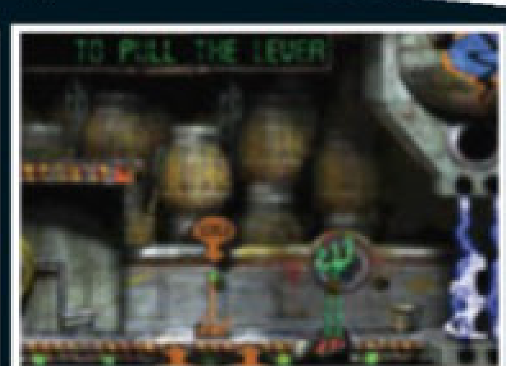
Comedy
If Oddworld Inhabitants' output was entirely without humour, it would consume players in breathless anxiety and depression. The great voices, the farts, the visual flourishes, the funny walks and the snigger of the Sligs all helped to lighten the mood.

Political views
Was there anything political in the fact the game's downtrodden Mudoken's were being harvested for their tears? "We are, if one is actually paying attention, witnessing an incompetent and arguably insane elite class of globalists actively ruin the planet for the rest of us for their own short-term power gains," says Lorne. So, yes.

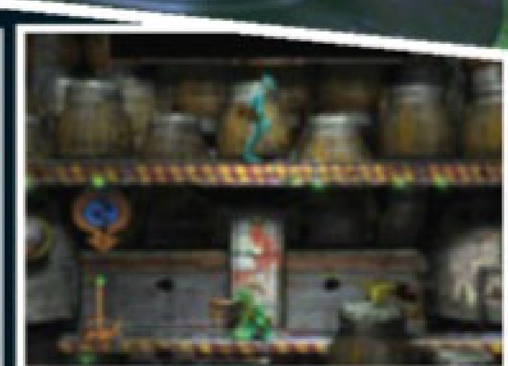




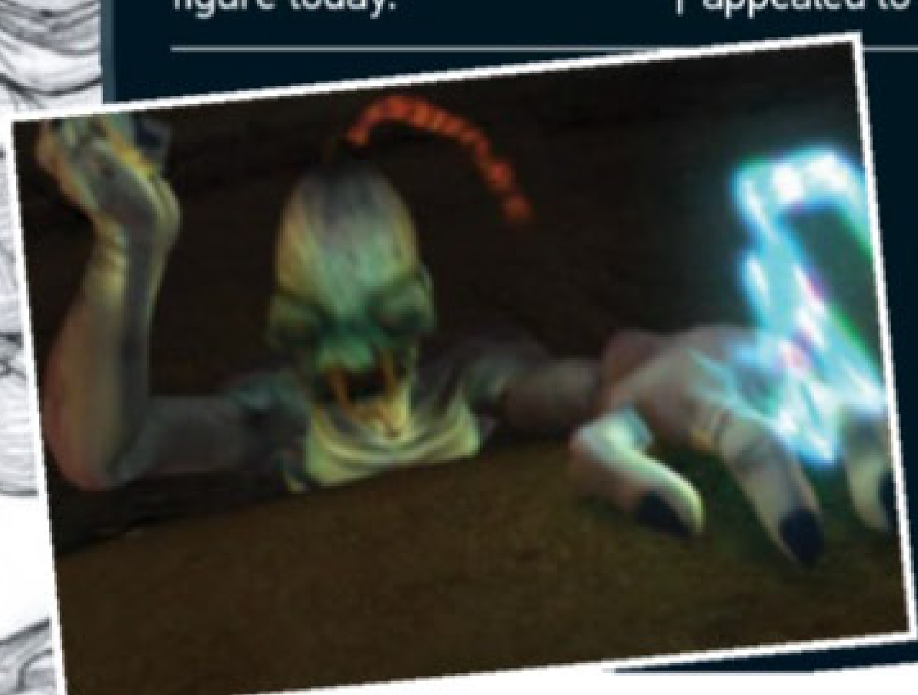
Lorne Lanning
Had Lorne not had his vision of a world populated by characters that would span many games there would be no Oddworld Inhabitants and no *Oddworld* games. Lorne is without doubt the beating heart of the company and the central figure today.



Difficult puzzles
PC Zone magazine did not mince its words when describing the gameplay of the first game in the series, *Abe's Oddysee*: "It's too f***ing hard," it said. And it was. The difficulty level eased a little as the series went on but it was very much a game that appealed to the hardcore.



2D graphics
The decision was made to make the first two games 2D and given that they are the most recognisable, most people will identify *Oddworld* games with a 2D universe. *Munch's Oddysee* and *Stranger's Wrath* were 3D but the new *Abe's Oddysee, New 'N' Tasty*, will be 2.5D.



Rows and resolutions
Lorne is outspoken and unafraid of getting things off his chest. He shunned the PS2 in favour of an Xbox-only deal only to return to Sony in later years with the HD remakes. He also called on the Xbox One team to be fired for focusing too much on triple-A blockbusters to what he saw as the detriment of indie games.

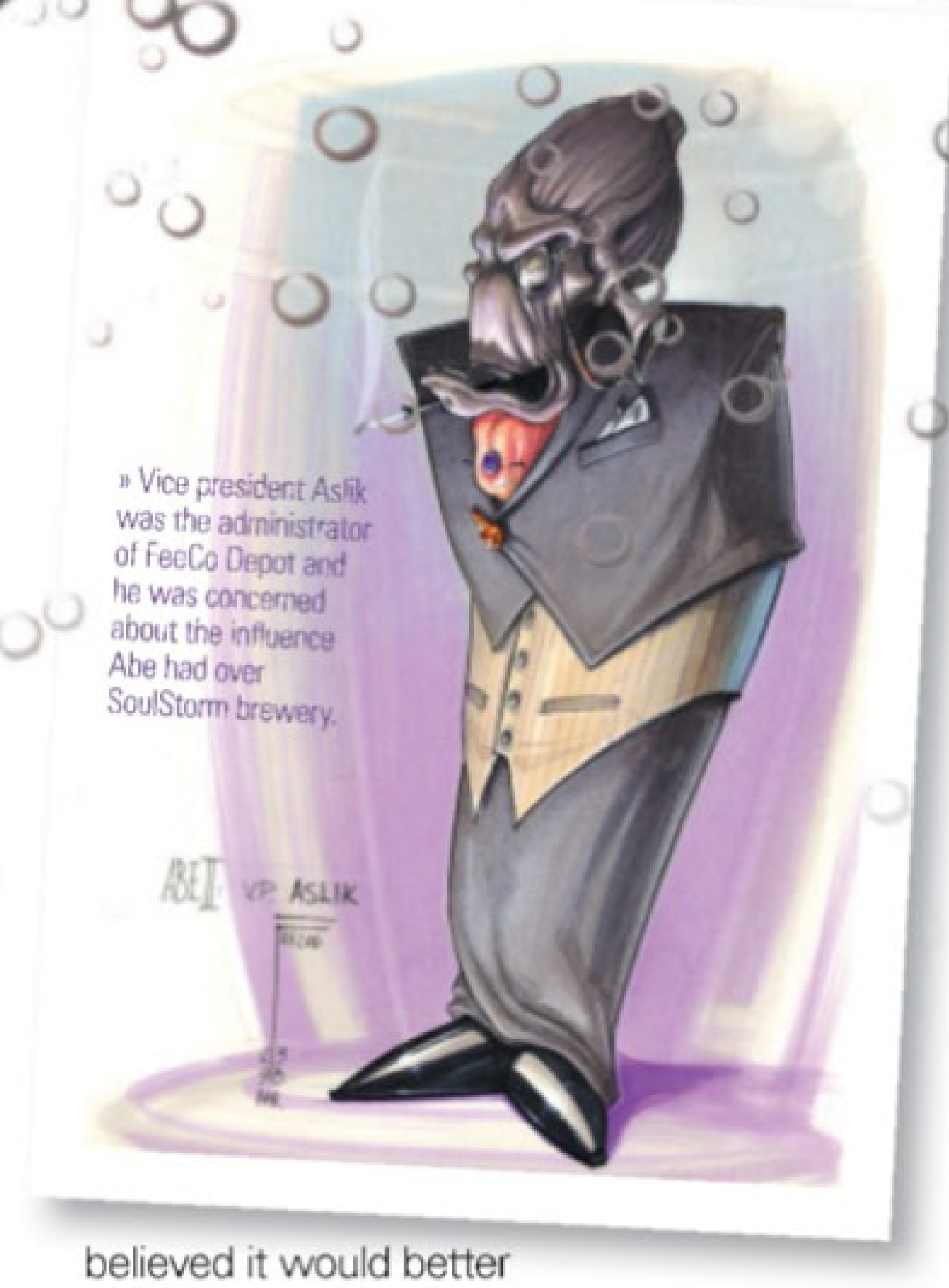


▶ more than potato chips, it was and is a very [worthwhile] goal. *Oddworld* was pitched to me when I first started as a 'Dysfunctional Disneyland' and this concept always spoke to me."

Abe's Exoddus became the first videogame to be nominated for an Academy Award. To qualify, cutscenes from the game were shown in a theatre in Los Angeles. But although it sold well, Oddworld Inhabitants' relationship with publishers was becoming strained. It was also a time of flux: *Oddworld: Hand Of Odd* was a real-time strategy game that was being worked on around the same time as *Exoddus* but it was canned in 1999. There was talk of two karting games with an Abe theme. They, too, didn't materialise. Instead gamers could enjoy Saffire's *Oddworld Adventures 2* on the Game Boy Color although this was merely a port of *Exoddus*. Oddworld Inhabitants struggled to work with the PS2, as well – "high-quality 3D games on the PS2 were a more complicated challenge for the *Munch* team," admits Chris. It didn't help that the company was becoming weary of developing games for publishers, believing them to be more concerned about shareholders than the actual games. The politics of *Oddworld* – the feelings of slavery, the downtrodden serfs putting in all the work only for the lords to take the spoils – was, ironically enough, spilling over into real-life.

"We got tired of the bullshit of the developer-publisher broken relationships that plagued the triple-A console space," says Lorne. "We saw that our destiny was one of inevitable acquisition with diminishing incentives that would take a lot more effort if we stayed on the traditional path. I guess you could say the fun was being lost to conditions of the industry."

Even so, Oddworld Inhabitants knew, at that time, that publishers were still an essential link in the chain, which is why it continued to link with one. It was able to resolve its PS2 issues, though: the third Oddworld Inhabitants game, *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee*, became an exclusive for the Xbox in 2001 even though it has been announced for the PlayStation 2. Oddworld Inhabitants


» Vice president Aslik was the administrator of FeeCo Depot and he was concerned about the influence Abe had over SoulStorm brewery.

believed it would better realise its ambition for the game on Microsoft's machine.

M*unch* was Oddworld's first fully-3D game even though the designers and programmers had little collective experience in building real-time games in the third dimension. It was a hard project. "The *Munch* production was smack dab in the middle of the perfect storm of game development: an incredibly ambitious design centred around two-player co-op, a launch title on a new console platform and an undercooked third-party engine," says Chris. The switch from PS2 to Xbox delayed the project – leading to the three-year gap between games. Oddworld Inhabitants also insisted that, on paper at least, there were to be no budget considerations. It led to ambitious thinking, much of it taking a while to implement. "Lorne wanted us to think big and we did," says Farzad. "It was always way easier to make a huge idea smaller and budgetarily achievable, than try to make a weaker, cheaper idea great."

Buoyed by the success of the game – even though it was less successful than the other two titles – there had been discussions over a 2D platform game called *SligStorm* but this was axed due to the demand for 3D. *Munch's Oddysee* was released for the Game Boy Advance, courtesy of Art Co, but the next major release would be the fourth *Oddworld* game *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*, some years later in 2005. Released again as an Xbox


» [Xbox] A Stranger walked into town in *Stranger's Wrath*, looking to rid Oddworld of criminals.


» [Xbox] *Stranger's Wrath* made great use of 3D, combining third-person and first-person play.


» *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty* has been rebuilt from the ground up and looks glorious. Expect our review next month.

"Walking into this Oddworld office was like ascending the staircase to some kind of artistic Valhalla"

SCRIPTWRITER CHRIS ULM LOVED THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

exclusive, it was to be the last. Even though the team was working on a new standalone, non-quintology game called *The Brutal Battle Of Fangus Klot*, poor sales of *Stranger's Wrath* and increasing disillusion with publishers, meant Oddworld Inhabitants found itself having to make a major decision. EA may well have tabled a bid to buy the company but Lorne wasn't having any of it. He was angry at EA, accusing it of failing to distribute the game properly, but more than that, he was disheartened. Believing *Stranger's Wrath* to be the developer's best game overall, he bemoaned the lack of marketing budget. There was also little enthusiasm for another instalment so Oddworld Inhabitants decided that it would leave the videogame industry while it waited for a new model of business to arrive. "We placed a big bet and took a hiatus," says Lorne. In April 2005, Lorne announced the studio would be cancelling all of its projects.

Instead, the idea was to look at starting a new world from fresh IP using an entirely new Hollwood-style business model that would see Oddworld Inhabitants find funds, plan the project and freelance it out. Lorne and Sherry teamed up with Vanguard Animation to develop *Citizen Siege* which was to be an original CG animated feature. By going into film, Oddworld Inhabitants was showing its tiredness of the videogame industry and yet it understood the wealth of talent within gaming: the idea was that talent from games and film would be used to produce the animation. The theme was similar to *Oddworld* – revolving around an ex-patriot who found himself ensnared in a nightmarish credit racket that left him repossessed in a new universe where current global conditions are extrapolated into a frightening near future in which democracy has all but disintegrated under global corporatism – but the film never got made.

There had also been a plan to create a game called *Wage Wars* that would tie into *Citizen Siege* and a HD machinima series was to be produced. Again, these did not come to fruition. In 2008, though, there was some movement. "We were waiting for digital distribution to arrive," says Lorne. "By 2008 we were realising the Western financial crisis wasn't helping any of our other efforts but around the same time Steam was becoming a viable distribution platform, then GOG, then PSN, and so on." *Abe's Oddysee* and *Abe's Exoddus* were released on Steam and other digital distribution platforms.

In 2009, Lorne and the CEO of Just Add Water, Stewart Gilray were introduced at the Game Developers Conference. An agreement was struck to allow Just Add Water to recover archived data but it developed into allowing the developer to bring *Munch's Oddysee* and *Stranger's Wrath* to Steam. The first two games were also released as PS One Classics in 2009. By 2010, a new Oddworld.com website was created and PC ports of *Munch's Oddysee* and *Stranger's Wrath* were released. Remastered versions of the games followed. In 2014, Just Add Water rebuilt *Abe's Oddysee* from the ground up using Unity to create the game in 2.5D. It is not, Lorne insists, an HD remake.

"*New 'N' Tasty* is our way of revisiting what we think of as a Grimm Fairy Tale," he adds, now heading a company in which Just Add Water tends to do the bulk of development. "We wanted to stick with the original script so it's a redux told in the same rhyme, modernised it to make it more beautiful."

For Oddworld Inhabitants, this represents an entire new world – a different way of working. But it's a positive one, with plans to bring back some of the games that were devised but abandoned. "It's exciting and it shows that we are very much alive as a company," says Lorne. "We can't wait to see the reaction of gamers." *

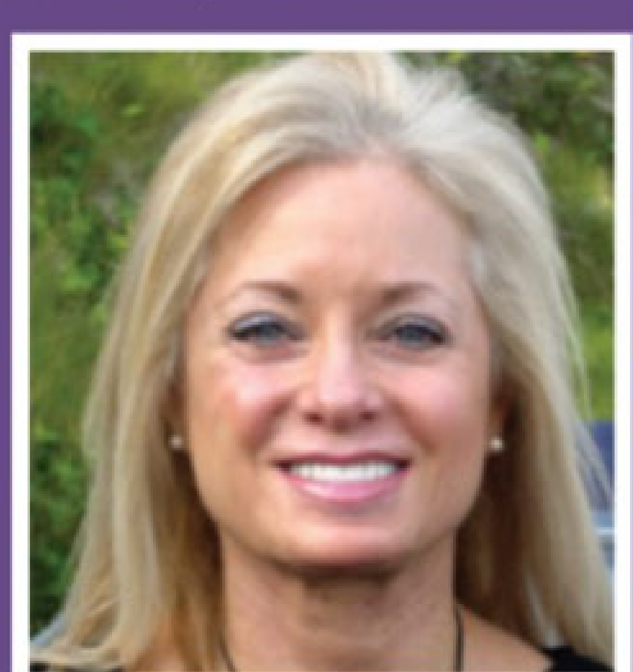


WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Lorne Lanning
Lorne remains the president of Oddworld Inhabitants. He has few staff, though. Thanks to his successful deal with Just Add Water in 2009, Oddworld Inhabitants has been able to outsource development work. Just Add Water has created *Stranger's Wrath HD*, *Munch's Oddysee HD* and *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*, bringing *Oddworld* games to a new audience. Lorne is a frequent speaker at games industry events.

Sherry McKenna
Still at Oddworld Inhabitants, Sherry is the company's CEO and has been for close to 20 years. She works with Lorne on the future direction of the *Oddworld* series and on fresh IP. *Citizen Siege* is not completely dead in the water and could be due a dusting off at some point.





Farzad Varahramyan
Farzad is the creative visual director of Appy Entertainment. He left Oddworld after *Munch's Oddysee* was released. His talents have been put to good use in Hollywood too. He is credited for the creature effects on the 2007 film *Aliens Vs Predator: Requiem* as well as *Race To Witch Mountain* in 2009, both completed by the special effects company Amalgamated Dynamics.

Paul O'Connor
Paul is brand director for Appy Entertainment. He had gone on to become a producer and game designer for EA in 2001, leaving in 2002 to be the lead game designer at Sammy Studios. For six years he was VP and design director of High Moon Studios where he directed the design of *The Bourne Conspiracy*. He co-founded Appy Entertainment in 2008.

Chris Ulm
Chris, like Farzad and Paul, left Oddworld Inhabitants years ago, becoming chief design officer of Sammy Studios and the chief development officer of High Moon Studios. Eventually the trio went on to set up Appy Entertainment, a company which develops and publishes social-mobile games.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home



» Hitting multiple enemies with the bell is not only an effective tactic, but a high-scoring one. Each enemy is worth twice the points of the last, making combos worth trying.

» Attacking with the trailing bell requires planning – you're responding to enemy movements rather than directly assaulting them, and enemies can still evade when the bell is moving.

» Returning characters from previous games have received a makeover for their appearance in *Tinkle Pit*, but retain their old abilities – these Pookas from *Dig Dug* can travel through walls.

» When a whole cake is collected, this slice will grow into a whole cake and a new slice will spawn. Growing your items is an important step to achieving high scores.



TINKLE PIT

■ **Developer:** Namco ■ **Year:** 1993 ■ **Genre:** Maze Game

■ **If you ever need reminding that the arcade market of the early Nineties was a weird, transitional scene, *Tinkle Pit* should serve well.** Despite the declining popularity of traditional maze games and the market's preference for the 3D games which were finally beginning to come of age, Namco chose to release *Tinkle Pit* into arcades in 1993. That's the same year it released *Ridge Racer*. But while it's true that *Tinkle Pit* is something of an anachronism, it plays rather well.

You play as a young blonde chap, who happens to be accompanied by an anthropomorphic sleigh bell. He's promptly plonked into a maze to fight all manner of enemies, including familiar Namco characters drawn from games such as *Toy Pop* and *Dig Dug*. The main way to defeat enemies is with the bell. Pressing a button fixes its position, allowing your hero to run around the maze while leaving a trail of string behind. When the button is released, the bell will follow the trail back to your position, knocking out any enemies it encounters along the way. You can also collect yellow energy balls which are thrown forward and bounce around the maze, but these are single-use and can only defeat one enemy at a time. Stages are cleared by eliminating every enemy. Every few stages, a boss will appear which takes multiple hits to defeat.

Tinkle Pit manages to keep things interesting, with good scoring mechanics largely responsible for this. Greater scores are awarded for knocking out multiple enemies with the bell, encouraging you to leave longer trails. However, long trails allow enemies more time to leave the bell's path. Additionally, each stage contains pick-ups which award more points. These come in small and large varieties, and you're encouraged to pick up large items to allow small ones to grow. Pick up all eight large items and you'll get a major bonus.

There's a lot to like about *Tinkle Pit* and Namco fans will enjoy spotting all the returning characters – there's even a power-up which turns you into *Pac-Man*. However, thanks to its Japan-only release and the general decline of maze games as a genre, it's easy to see why *Tinkle Pit* didn't receive any conversions.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

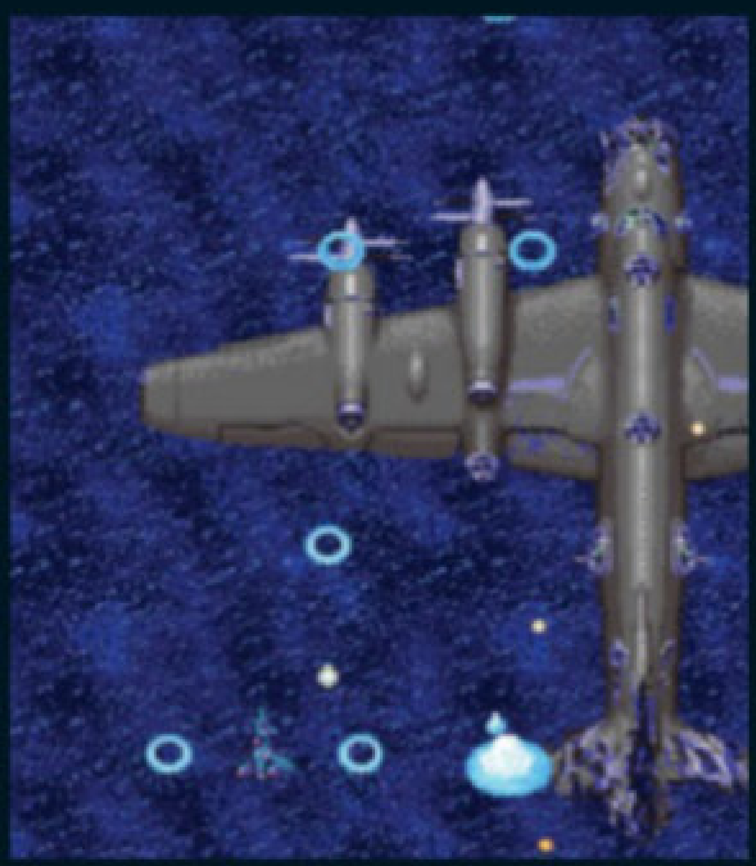
PENGO 1982

Sega's block-kicking penguin has appeared on a variety of formats since his debut, including the Atari 2600, Commodore 64 and Game Gear. However we're big fans of the 1995 Mega Drive remake which features new mechanics and a multiplayer mode, as well as an excellent conversion of the original arcade game.



ARBALESTER

■ **Developer:** Seta ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up


» [Arcade] A relatively unremarkable shoot-'em-up, but *Arbalester* includes some impressively large enemies.

■ **If you're not well versed in medieval weaponry, that title might seem a bit strange to you.** An arbalest is a crossbow variant, which is of course perfect for a game about fighter planes. *Arbalester* is a rather traditional shoot-'em-up in the same vein as the likes of 1942 – no bullet hell here. As well as shooting forward, your plane bombs ground-level targets by default, and comes equipped with an exchangeable secondary weapon that can send miniature planes or massive flying fortresses at the enemy.

Visually the game takes an age to get going, with very little variation in the sea backgrounds of the early stages, though it does pick up a little later on with the inclusion of cloudscapes and forests. Much better are the gigantic bosses on offer, but these are sadly few and far between. *Arbalester* is a largely unremarkable shooter, with little to distinguish it from the more accomplished competition that had arisen in the late Eighties. This likely put paid to its chances of a NES release back then, but paradoxically increases the appeal of the game today – it has the simplicity of a mid-Eighties shoot-'em-up but feels fresher due to a lack of familiarity.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY 1987

Capcom's shoot-'em-up also has a realistic theme, but as the sequel to the popular *1942* it received a number of home conversions, appearing on the major home micros as well as the NES and PC Engine. Arcade-perfect versions later appeared on *Capcom Classics Collection Volume 1* for PlayStation 2 and Xbox.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

NBA JAM 1993

After blowing the arcade sports genre wide open, it was inevitable that *NBA Jam* would make the trip to home consoles, and it eventually arrived on the Mega Drive, Mega-CD, Game Gear, Game Boy and SNES. It happens to be a fair bit better than *Rim Rockin' Basketball*, too.



RIM ROCKIN' BASKETBALL

■ **Developer:** Incredible Technologies ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Sports

■ ***Rim Rockin' Basketball* is a strange release.** Struggling forth on noticeably dated hardware, the game offered a more serious take on basketball than the likes of Midway's *Arch Rivals*. The game switches perspective as the ball is turned over to the opposing team and players are limited to simple shots and passes. Certain fouls are included and the occasional graphical touch such as a shattering backboard enlivens proceedings, but overall this is not spectacular work.

The game's major saving grace is its multiplayer, as up to four players are supported by the cabinet. However, there's a major downside to this – a full game will last the best part of an hour as the game counts down its quarters in real time, but credits only last for a fraction of a quarter. As a result, playing a full game of *Rim Rockin' Basketball* is ridiculously expensive, especially when multiple players are involved. Games from Incredible Technologies never received home conversions, explaining the failure of *Rim Rockin' Basketball* to make it to consoles.


» [Arcade] The attacking team is always running upwards, as the viewpoint changes at each turnover.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

MIRAI NINJA

■ **Developer:** Namco ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ **Licensed from a film of the same name, *Mirai Ninja* is a run-and-gun game that was exclusive to Japanese arcades.** The basic premise isn't too different from games such as *The Legend Of Kage*, with a seemingly limitless supply of ninjas zapping in to provide shuriken-fodder. The game doesn't look too bad, with nice stylistic touches like a life indicator written in kanji, and it contains some rather neat sections with massive rotating sprites that admittedly look very impressive. Unfortunately, that's where the praise ends.

Stage design in *Mirai Ninja* is incredibly dull, with flat layouts that barely differentiate themselves from one another. Enemy design is similarly bland, with few foes providing any real challenge – even the bosses are pushovers. Worse yet, power-ups are limited to a screen-clearing smart bomb and a triple shot. It feels extraordinarily dated, bearing in mind that ninja games such as *Strider* and *The Revenge Of Shinobi* appeared in the same year. If licensing was the factor that prevented this from making a home appearance, we should be grateful.


» [Arcade] This screenshot actually looks pretty interesting, which gives a rather misleading impression of *Mirai Ninja*. Sorry, readers.

Banjo-Kazooie

If you were betting on adventurers to defeat an evil witch, neither a lazy bear nor a sarcastic bird would give particularly favourable odds. The unlikely combination of the two, though? Easy money. Join Nick Thorpe as he examines the career of two of Rare's most beloved characters





When we think of console gaming in the late Nineties, there are certain memories that always feature very prominently – the dodgy commentary of football games, the rise of the 3D fighting game and the need to hunt down every last item in 3D platformers. Make no mistake, the 'collectathon' mascot platformer was one of gaming's hottest sub-genres during the N64 years – and *Banjo-Kazooie* was the game that started the trend. Riding high off the success of the *Donkey Kong Country* series and *GoldenEye*, Rare was one of the world's leading development teams and perhaps the only team capable of making the unusual pairing of a sarcastic bird with a lazy bear work, thanks to its trademark sense of humour.

With that in mind, it's funny that neither Banjo nor Kazooie originally appeared in the plans for the game they'd debut in, and it wasn't originally a mascot platformer at all.

It all started with a dream – or more precisely *Project Dream*. *Project Dream* was a SNES adventure game that featured a young boy named Edison, who would become involved with a pirate crew led by Captain Blackeye. The plan was to utilise the same graphical approach as *Donkey Kong Country*, which had become a smash hit largely due to its incredible pre-rendered 3D visuals. However, technology was moving on and Nintendo's next platform was on the way, so work transferred to the N64. This would allow the game to play out in full 3D, but it was a move that caused the team some issues. ▶



» [N64] Visiting Bottles to learn new moves was vital to ensure you'd explored every nook and cranny.



» [N64] Large structures like poor old Clanker here were very impressive, acting as distinct environments within stages.



DYNAMIC DUOS

Some of gaming's other great double acts

POPO AND NANA

DEBUT: Ice Climber **YEAR:** 1985

■ Working together to climb the mountain only works so well in *Ice Climber*, as bonus stages for Popo and Nana turn into competition. However, when they decide to team up to fight everybody else they're an absolute nightmare, as players of *Super Smash Bros Melee* will tell you.

BUB AND BOB

DEBUT: Bubble Bobble **YEAR:** 1986

■ They might not perform the fancy team-up moves of other duos, but they make up for it by being probably the cutest pair on the list. They're also incredibly prolific, appearing across not only the many *Bubble Bobble* games but the *Puzzle Bobble* (or *Bust-A-Move*) spin-off series as well.

HEAD AND HEELS

DEBUT: Head Over Heels **YEAR:** 1987

■ The dual heroes of this Eighties classic were the perfect complement to one another, with Head's high jumps and enemy-stunning attacks working extremely well alongside Heels' speed and ability to carry objects. As you controlled both, making use of their abilities was essential to making progress.

SONIC AND TAILS

DEBUT: Sonic The Hedgehog 2 **YEAR:** 1992

■ Sonic's vulpine mate wasn't initially a great help – an excellent invincible shield when controlled by a second player in the main game, but a total liability in the hands of the CPU during special stages. In *Sonic 3* Tails became rather more useful, as he could carry Sonic while flying.

CHANG AND CHOI

DEBUT: The King Of Fighters '94 **YEAR:** 1994

■ These perennial teammates are a criminal duo, noted as much for their fearsome fighting skills as their comically contrasting sizes. Their crowning moment of cooperation came in *Capcom Vs SNK 2*, in which they fight alongside one another to take advantage of the numbers game. Underhanded? Of course – they're criminals.



» [N64] Reaching high vantage points gave some impressive views of *Banjo-Kazooie*'s large stages.



» [N64] The plot of *Banjo-Tooie* was noticeably darker than that of the original, with Bottles being killed early on.



» [N64] Grunty shows off her new skeletal look for *Banjo-Tooie*, acquired after being trapped under a boulder in *Banjo-Kazooie*.

"Coming from developing *Donkey Kong Country*, we'd been used to producing extremely high definition in our visuals," explains Chris Sutherland, credited as chief keyboard tapper on *Banjo-Kazooie*. "With the N64, we initially wanted to render the 3D models' geometry directly. Unfortunately the reality of 'Project Reality' was that the kind of tech to handle the quality we wanted was still years away." The team attempted an approach that combined a 3D landscape with 2D sprites, but camera freedom exposed problems with the multi-layered sprites – as the view shifted, overlapping sprites would swap over one another. At the same time, the *Conker* team had made great strides with a fully 3D approach, and *Project Dream* switched to match.

Of course, it wouldn't be the only change that was made. The game slowly metamorphosed, first with the replacement of Edison as protagonist. "When we swapped in a bear we amended the speech for the bear character – so originally he did speak real words, with 'Guhuh' noises too," explains Chris, who provided Banjo's voice. Notably, Kazooie was absent at this point, leading to the early characterisation seen in *Diddy Kong Racing*. Banjo's partner arrived as a justification for a design decision. By this point the game had transitioned to being a more traditional 3D platformer, and the team had wanted to give Banjo a double jump as a result. This was represented with wings emerging from his backpack, but this looked odd on its own, so Kazooie was created to make it make sense.





» [N64] *Banjo-Tooie* boasts some of the most impressive stage designs on the N64.

“Our aims were generally to make it bigger and better than the first in terms of world size and variety”

Chris Sutherland

Despite its convoluted route to completion, *Banjo-Kazooie* became an instant classic upon its release in the summer of 1998. The game racked up sales effortlessly and review scores were high all round, with many critics at the time declaring that the game had surpassed Nintendo's classic *Super Mario 64*. It undeniably held the edge in some respects – the rich texturing of *Banjo-Kazooie*'s worlds made it one of the best-looking games to have been released on the N64, and the game's dual protagonists and humorous writing gave it a much greater sense of character. If there was one criticism that could be aimed at *Banjo-Kazooie*, it was one that was common to many 3D games of the time – the camera could be a little wayward, not always being as helpful as it could be.

It's arguable that if no sequel to *Banjo-Kazooie* had been planned, the game's runaway success would have made one inevitable. However, *Banjo-Tooie* was known to be on the cards as the title was mentioned at the close of the first game. “Our aims were generally to make it bigger and better than the first,” Chris explains, “both in terms of the world size and also the variety – by having the main characters split up and also by adding multiplayer play.” With the collectathon platforming of the original proving so popular, the decision to go with an improved version of the first game made a lot of sense.

Having failed in her attempt to steal the good looks of Banjo's sister Tooty in the first game, the series' antagonist Gruntilda was out for revenge. Two years spent trapped under a boulder ▶

JIGGIES AND JALOPIES

The racing cameos that have bookended Banjo's career

Banjo's debut appearance wasn't actually in his own game, but in Rare's N64 racer *Diddy Kong Racing*. Releasing over six months before *Banjo-Kazooie*, the game features a rather early version of Banjo, with some unusual characterisation. Although his trademark utterance “guhuh!” is present and correct, he speaks English normally when announcing his name. What's more, Kazooie doesn't accompany him, marking the only occasion in which one appeared in a game without the other. Another *Banjo-Kazooie* character does make an appearance, though – the turtle Tiptup, who would later make an appearance as the choir conductor in Bubblegloop Swamp. Also making his debut was Conker, who arrived with a rather sweeter demeanour than the foulmouthed squirrel we saw in *Bad Fur Day*. Like Banjo, he was introduced to build familiarity with players prior to the release of his own game.

At the other end of Banjo's career, we have Banjo and Kazooie making a cameo appearance in *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*. Sega had been speaking with platform holders about exclusive content for individual versions, but in the end only Microsoft came through, securing Rare's characters a spot in the Xbox 360 version. The two actually made for a more sensible fit than many of Sega's own inclusions – after all, *Nuts & Bolts* was a vehicle-based game. While they didn't receive their own tracks or music, they did have a unique special attack. Kazooie would point Mumbo's magic wrench skyward, resulting in a rain of giant jiggies which would batter Sega's racers.



COLLECTION CAPERS

The Banjo-Kazooie games are renowned for their collectables – just how many are there?

Banjo-Kazooie

900 NOTES USED TO ACCESS DOORS IN GRUNTY'S LAIR

100 JIGGIES USED TO ACCESS NEW STAGES

100 MUMBO TOKENS USED TO ACTIVATE MUMBO'S MAGIC

45 JINJOS USED TO GAIN JIGGIES

24 HONEYCOMB PIECES GAIN EXTRA HIT POINTS

PLUS…

- BLUE EGGS
- RED FEATHERS
- GOLDEN FEATHERS

Banjo-Tooie

160 NOTE NESTS EACH CONTAINING 5 NOTES, USED TO LEARN NEW MOVES

10 TREBLE CLEFS EACH CONTAINING 20 NOTES

45 JINJOS USED TO GAIN JIGGIES

90 JIGGIES USED TO ACCESS NEW STAGES

18 GLOWBOS USED TO ACTIVATE MUMBO'S MAGIC

24 HONEYCOMB PIECES GAIN EXTRA HIT POINTS

PLUS…

- RED FEATHERS
- GOLDEN FEATHERS
- BLUE EGGS
- FIRE EGGS
- ICE EGGS
- CLOCKWORK KAZOOIE EGGS
- GRENADE EGGS

Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts

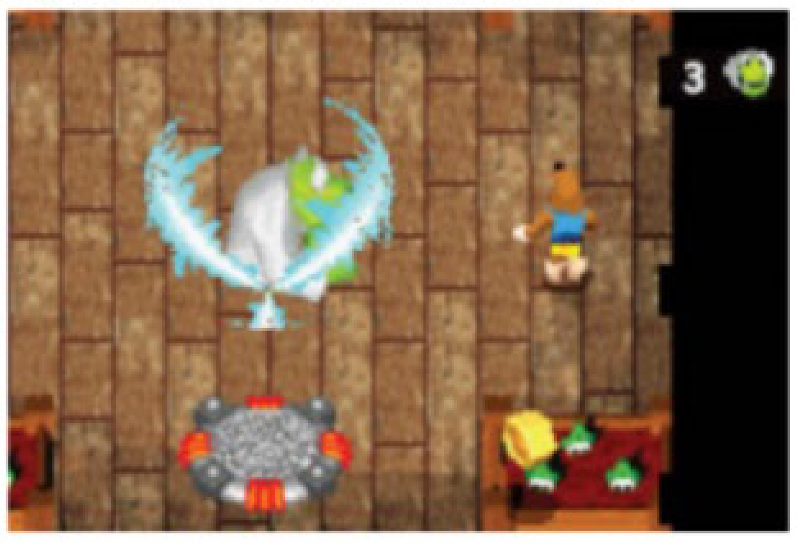
5230 NOTES USED TO BUY ITEMS

131 JIGGIES USED TO ACCESS NEW STAGES

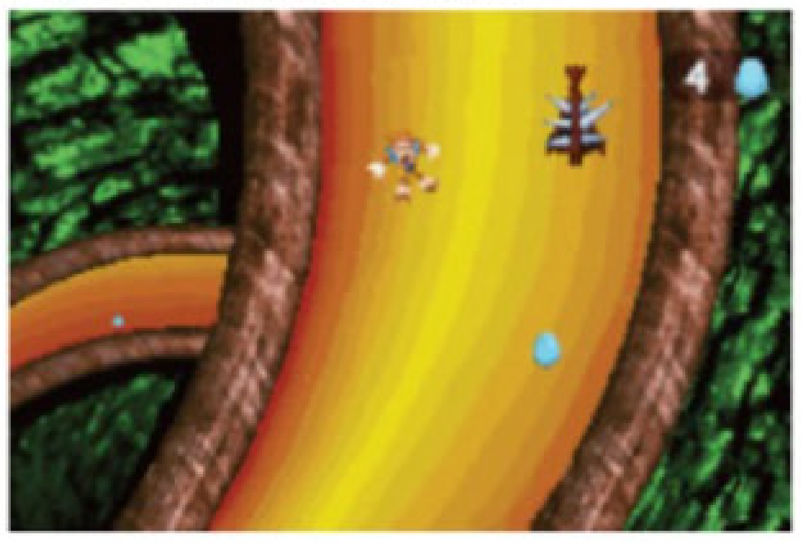
92 TT TROPHIES USED TO GET JIGGIES



» [GBA] Standard *Banjo-Kazooie* elements such as boss battles remained present in *Grunty's Revenge*.



» [GBA] New mini-games included sheep dipping and this slide game, in which you collect eggs.





» [GBA] The early development of *Banjo-Pilot* took place with alternate branding as *Diddy Kong Pilot*.

▶ reduced her to a skeletal form, and she was out to restore her body by sucking the life from other creatures. Banjo and Kazooie once again set out to stop her, but not before she manages to kill Bottles. Luckily they retain all of the moves they were taught in the first game, and gain new abilities in the second including the ability to split up.

With *Banjo-Kazooie* having already been an impressive N64 game, the team faced challenges in creating the bigger, better experience they had envisioned. "The *Banjo-Tooie* engine had to cope with much larger worlds, so we had to juggle what was in and out of memory as the player moved around the level," explains Chris. The addition of multiplayer also required a lot of reworking, as the original code assumed that the entire game was single-player. But surprisingly, one of the game's new collectables proved to be one of the most problematic inclusions: "The Clockwork Kazooie bomb turned out to be more of a challenge due to the ability to direct it into other areas of the world like any other playable character and trigger other events, sometimes in the originating area. This meant there was always a good source of bugs, some of which we didn't spot and crept into the final game."

Banjo-Tooie launched late in 2000, to a response almost as enthusiastic as that which had greeted its predecessor. Millions of sales were achieved, and critical response was again universally positive. The game's larger areas and improved visuals were lauded, but both came at a cost. Some design improvements made things slightly more manageable, such as non-respawning notes, but it was simply much harder to keep track of what was going on in the wider world of *Banjo-Tooie* due to the frequent need to backtrack. Also, while the visuals were some of the most detailed to have been seen on the N64, the system often dropped frames as it struggled to cope with them. Despite the promise of a *Banjo-Threeie* at the end of the game, the system was near the end of its life – any sequel was going to have to come on a new machine.

At the time, it was easy to assume that the new machine would be Nintendo's GameCube. However, this would not come to pass as Nintendo sold Rare to Microsoft in 2002 – but not before Rare had started a variety of Game Boy Advance projects, two of which were Banjo games. The years that followed were rather difficult for the bird and bear, as neither of the Game Boy Advance titles lived up to the standard of the N64 adventures. The first of these was an isometric adventure set between the first two games, *Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge*.

Upon its mid-2001 unveiling *Grunty's Revenge* looked to be targeting a similar experience to the home console games, with large open areas, moves to be learned including Kazooie's ability to fly, and lots of items to collect. The sale of Rare put the game's future in doubt, but Microsoft allowed the project to continue as the Game Boy Advance was not competing against any Microsoft products – however, a publisher would have to be found. THQ picked the game up in 2003, and subsequent interviews with Rare explained that the original "sprawling, unwieldy" maps had been refined. However, comments made by a former Rare programmer since suggest that the problem was one ▶



» [GBA] Though the Game Boy Advance couldn't handle large 3D environments, the isometric perspective simulated them well.





▶ of cartridge capacity – stages and features needed to be cut to stay within the size limit, dropping the game from a planned nine stages to six, including the Spiral Mountain hub world. One of the features cut was flight, which simply wasn't working well with the 3D collision engine that was introduced during the game's publisher-less year.

B*anjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge* was released in the autumn of 2003 to a mixed response, with reviews ranging from highly desirable 90% scores to a rather damning 4/10. The majority of critics agreed that the main adventure was of a high quality, singling out the gameplay for praise. However the cutbacks had clearly taken their toll, as the most common complaint was that the game was entirely too short, ending just as it seemed to be getting going.

The next game, *Banjo-Pilot*, was actually revealed to the world shortly before *Grunty's Revenge*, but would emerge much later due to a rather tortured development. Originally announced in May 2001 as *Diddy Kong Pilot*, the game was an aerial racer with a Mode 7-style floor effect and tilt controls for steering. Unfortunately, the game wasn't progressing tremendously well and missed its scheduled early 2002 release date. But any hope of fixing it as a Diddy Kong game flew away when Rare was sold to Microsoft. As well as suffering from the same need to find a publisher that delayed *Grunty's Revenge*, the team now needed to perform a visual overhaul to remove Nintendo's characters. Luckily, Rare had a mascot character ready to climb into the cockpit – Banjo would have his own racing spin-off.

» (Above) [Xbox 360] Time Trial races in *Nuts & Bolts* awarded trophies, which in turn awarded jiggies.

» (Right) [Xbox 360] *Nuts & Bolts* finally introduced the Stop 'n' Swop feature first promised in the original game.





But first, the disappointing aspects of *Diddy Kong Pilot* needed to be corrected. Rare chose to go down a new route, resulting in a total overhaul of the game. The big problem with *Diddy Kong Pilot*'s flat landscapes was that they didn't make a whole lot of sense in a game about flight, a glaring flaw that the game's new engine corrected with 3D voxel landscapes. While tracks were short, they were impressive for the hardware. By the spring of 2004, *Banjo-Pilot* was shown off in screenshots for the first time in a couple of years, sporting its new engine and looking very nice. However, this version of the game was quietly cancelled later in the year, with speculation suggesting that the game didn't run quickly enough under the new engine.

Having entered development around the time of the Game Boy Advance launch, *Banjo-Pilot* finally arrived in January 2005, by which point the console had already been superseded by the Nintendo DS. Returning to the flat tracks of the original *Diddy Kong Pilot* design, the game was a solid



» [Xbox 360] While very little traditional platforming was found in *Nuts & Bolts*, a little bit still remained.

SILICON SNIGGERS

How the N64's development hardware kept Rare laughing



With the *Banjo-Kazooie* series being well-known for its sense of humour, you might imagine that the development team at Rare would have an established comedy dynamic behind the scenes – and you wouldn't be wrong. "The N64 titles were developed on Silicon Graphics Indy workstations," Chris explains. "The way those operated, you could silently log into anyone else's machine without them knowing, but you still had access to the hardware. That meant you could grab a screenshot of someone's desktop, or even from their webcam if they had one switched on – seems kind of crazy nowadays, I know!"

It does, but we can only briefly imagine our own applications for this prankster's heaven before Chris reveals how Rare's staff took advantage of it. "During development, when you least expected it, someone would log in and play some comedy sound files on your machine, to your surprise and others' amusement – ah, see what fun we're missing now with internet security!" We can only hope that the occasional Kazooie "bree!" sound was thrown in…

"Some people want to be '100 percenters' and so you want to give them that challenge"

Chris Sutherland

but unremarkable kart-style racer, differentiated mostly by the floaty physics of its vehicles. A lukewarm critical reception followed as a result, marking a rather underwhelming farewell to Nintendo hardware.

Despite Rare's acquisition by Microsoft, Banjo and Kazooie took a long time to reach the Xbox family, completely missing the big black box and finally appearing on the Xbox 360. But when they finally made the jump, it's safe to say that the game was not what many fans had expected. The first teaser video revealed that the game was not to be *Banjo-Threeie* in the traditional style – Banjo and Kazooie had received makeovers, sporting a chunkier look than on the N64. However, it was the reveal that delivered the biggest surprise. Collectables were out, the old moves were out, and even platforming was given the boot. *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts* would be a vehicular action game.

Grunty, now reduced to a skeletal head, was out for revenge against Banjo and Kazooie. The heroic pair had rather let themselves go though, having spent the last eight years doing anything other than adventuring. They're sent to finally settle their differences by the Lord Of Games, a creator of games who decrees that they will compete for control of Spiral Mountain, with the losing team forced to work in his game factory. From there Banjo and Kazooie need to obtain jiggies from vehicle-based challenges, which they have the freedom to approach in any manner thanks to highly customisable vehicles.

Perhaps influenced by recent assessments of collectathon platformers which tended to be heavily critical, the *Nuts & Bolts* team rather reduced the number of collectables in the game. The story also took a critical approach to the item-gathering gameplay of the Nintendo 64 games, lampooning it with typical self-deprecating humour. While Chris didn't work on *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts* (save to provide the voices for the characters), the balance of collectables is a design point that he is keen to talk about. "Some people want to be '100 percenters' and so you want to give them that challenge," he explains. "Ideally as long as a game can make the player *want* to collect the needed items without it feeling like a list of chores, then the numbers of the items is less relevant, but obviously the more items you need to collect the harder it is to keep the player feeling enthused." Ultimately, only jiggies and notes remained from the classic *Banjo-Kazooie* games, with new time trial trophies adding a third level.

As you might expect, long-term fans of the series gave *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts* a rough ride. The visual changes were poorly received, but it was the radical gameplay changes that really provoked online anger, with a vocal minority claiming that the game was a monstrosity that had ruined the series. However, the reception from those less heavily invested in the idea of a new platformer was actually rather good. The game was praised for its long-term value, with the vehicle building aspect of the game greeted enthusiastically by reviewers. However, some concerns were raised with loose handling. Structurally, the missions came in for criticism for being repetitive, and the game's interfaces and tutorials were considered somewhat obtrusive and not quite up to scratch. Despite the criticisms, the reception was good and exceeded that of the Game Boy Advance games.

Though *Nuts & Bolts* was the last game to star Banjo and Kazooie, they've been sighted in a couple of cameo appearances since, joining the cast of *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing* on the Xbox 360 and acting as a player skin in *Minecraft: Xbox 360 Edition*. In spite of their relatively quiet spell, the enduring popularity of the characters means that we'd never be surprised to see them return. Truly beloved mascots are hard to come by in videogames, and the excellence often displayed in the *Banjo-Kazooie* games serves to solidify the appeal of the unusual pairing. So while there are no plans for the duo on the horizon, don't be too surprised if you hear the "guhuh!" that has become symbolic of the series emerging from an Xbox console in the near future. *



» [Xbox 360] The impressive environments of *Nuts & Bolts* drew inspiration from the N64 games, retaining recognisable elements like this striped bridge.



ROGUE LEGACY

With PlayStation versions imminent, Darran Jones decided to interview designer Teddy Lee about his quirky roguelike

■ DEVELOPER: CELLAR DOOR GAMES ■ SYSTEM: PC ■ GENRE: ROGUELIKE

Budget. It's one of the most critical aspects of game development and can make or break a project if not handled correctly. And yet the overwhelming cost of Cellar Door Games' next project led to arguably one of the best indie games of last year. "The concept for *Rogue Legacy* came out of necessity," admits game designer Teddy Lee. "We were originally going to make a metroidvania-style game, but discovered that what we wanted to make was beyond our budget. So we took account of what we had (level editor, AI editor), and decided to see if we could build a game from the scraps. That's when we decided to make a roguelike since it helped resolve our biggest bottleneck, which was art."

It was a ballsy move, but the correct one, as *Rogue Legacy* is one of the finest roguelikes we've played for some time, and a satisfying alternative to the equally brilliant (but mechanically different) *Spelunky*. Players explore a procedurally generated *Castlevania*-style castle, defeating its cute minions and collecting gold along the way. Eventually, inevitably, you'll die – defeated by a skeleton, zombie or any of the other creatures found in the castle's themed areas. It's here though that *Rogue Legacy* plays its trump card. Rather than continue your quest with the same character you instead get to play as one his heirs. Each heir not only has access to a different class (more can be unlocked via an intricate skill tree) but also has traits – ranging from gigantism to ADHD – that can affect the game. "This was one of the first concepts we had," continues Teddy. "It came about because we wanted to [mix up] character change in roguelike games. Most roguelikes have the player slowly evolve over their play session. We wanted games to last [less than] five minutes, which meant everything needed to be sped up. So we knew that the characters would have to play differently at the very start of a game, which eventually led to the motif of children and genetic traits."

Like many roguelikes, *Rogue Legacy* is tough, but never brutally so, and you'll eventually be able to defeat the key bosses that guard each area – providing you're suitably powered up first… Interestingly enough, *Rogue Legacy's* difficulty wasn't an issue for the development team. "Managing difficulty wasn't that hard," continues Teddy, "it was just really, really, time consuming. We've been doing this for a while now, so when we started the game, we made sure that we had tools set up so that we could modify the thousands of variables and algorithms in the game quickly and efficiently. Spending time on making sure these tools worked really helped reduce the workload."

The focus paid off and *Rogue Legacy* went on to make back its initial $15,000 development cost in its first hour on sale, with a further 100,000 sales by the end of its first week. Needless to say, budget constraints shouldn't be an issue for the team's next project, whatever it may be… *



» [PC] Earned gold can be spent on unlocking new characters and abilites.

INFLUENCES

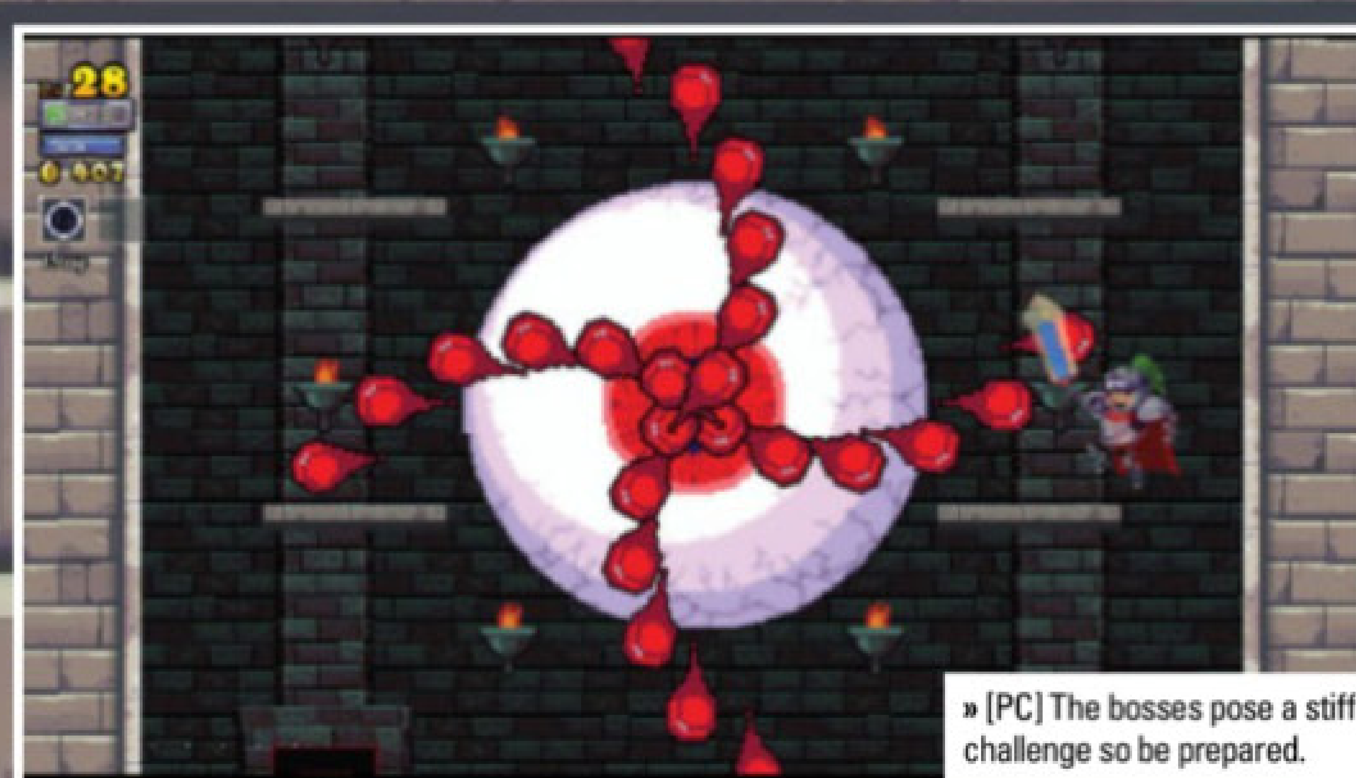
The games that inspired Rogue Legacy…

DEMON'S SOULS
DARK SOULS
CASTLEVANIA

> **"Glauber Kotaki had an art piece in his portfolio which really struck a chord with us, and we reached out to see if he was available. Luckily he was, and he kind of took it from there"**
>
> Teddy Lee on Rogue Legacy's distinctive art style



» [PC] You'll be reminded of just how many enemies you defeated before you died.



» [PC] The bosses pose a stiff challenge so be prepared.

THE TEAM

The people that made Rogue Legacy happen

TEDDY LEE
GAME DESIGNER

KENNY LEE
PROGRAMMER AND PRODUCER

GLAUBER KOTAKI
ART DIRECTOR

GORDON MCGLADDERY
SOUND DESIGNER AND MUSICIAN

JUDSON COWAN
MUSICIAN

MARIE-CHRISTINE BOURDUA
PRODUCER (SONY VERSIONS)

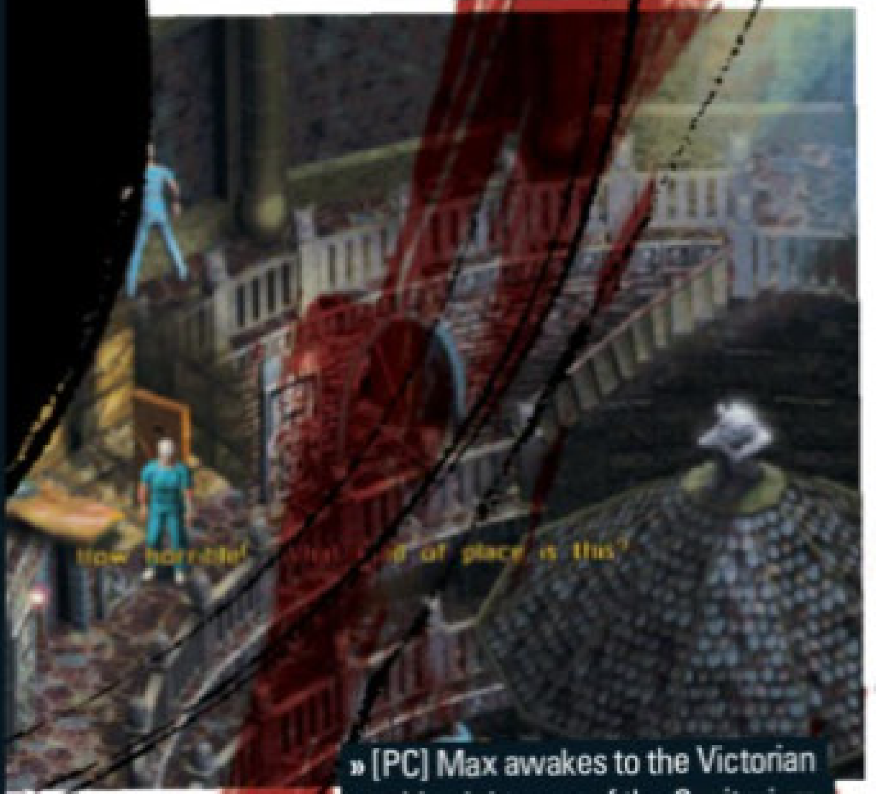
THE TEAM ON ROGUE LEGACY

DARRAN JONES
■ I love everything about *Rogue Legacy*, from its art style to its finely honed gameplay. While using heirs has been seen in games before, it's never been done as imaginatively as it was here.

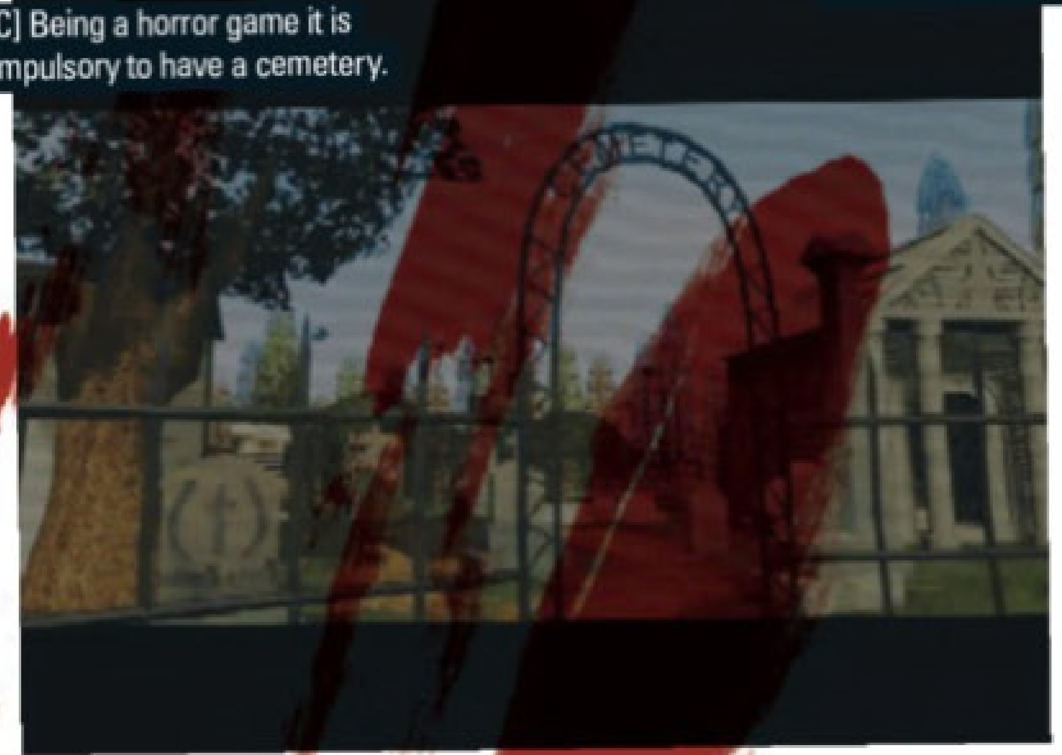
NICK THORPE
■ I'm not much of a PC gamer, so I haven't yet played *Rogue Legacy*. It does looks like the kind of game I'd enjoy, so I'll likely pick it up when the PlayStation Vita version arrives later in the year.

STEVE HOLMES
■ I was actually turned on to this because I also work on **Play** magazine and we were discussing its eventual PS4 release. Snapped it up on PC, loved it, died a hell of a lot. I'd recommend it to anyone, brilliant fun.

PAUL DRURY
■ Marrying sprightly platforming with compulsive level-grinding, *Rogue Legacy* is a marvellous sword slash through a sprawling, randomly generated castle.



» [PC] Max awakes to the Victorian gothic nightmare of the Sanitarium.



[PC] Being a horror game it is compulsory to have a cemetery.



» [PC] Max's first encounter with the disgusting blob, Mother.



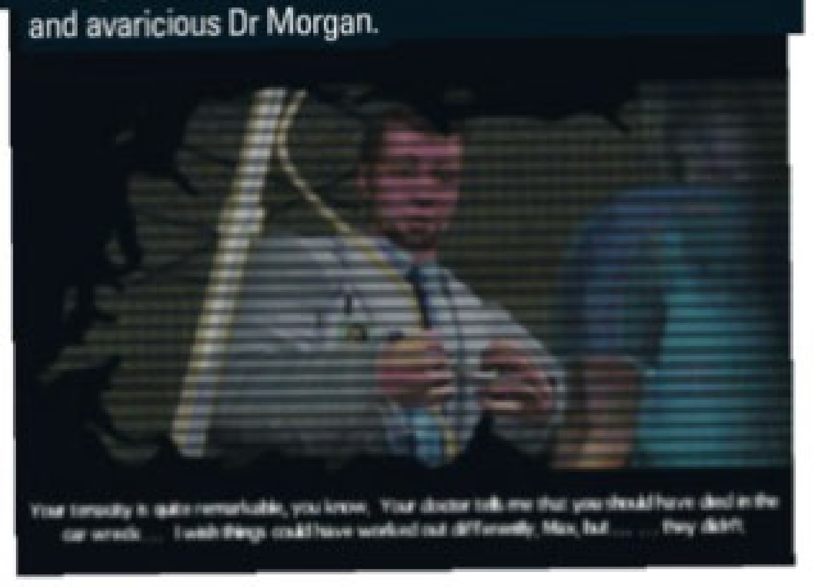
By 1998, point-and-click games, if not clinically dead, were on life support and a close relative's signature away from oblivion. Graeme Mason talks to two of the key men behind this moody and compelling last gasp...

SANITA



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ASC GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** DREAMFORGE INTERTAINMENT INC
- » **RELEASED:** 1998
- » **PLATFORM:** PC
- » **GENRE:** HORROR POINT-AND-CLICK



» [PC] The nefarious and avaricious Dr Morgan.

If there is one total demise of a genre that Retro Gamer ever felt most keenly, it was the death of the trusty point-and-click adventure. From early luminaries such as *Maniac Mansion*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and other SCUMM-powered efforts, through to latter 3D games such as Westwood's impressive *Blade Runner*, the genre had a legion of fans that slowly ebbed away in the face of a burgeoning assault of FPS and RTS games in the mid-to-late Nineties. Some say the games struggled to adapt to rapidly evolving graphics and became stagnant; others cite a reluctance on the part of the latest generation of gamers to endure the complex and obscure puzzles that point-and-click titles often presented. By 1997, the writing was on the wall, but this failed to deter some developers…

Formed in 1993, Dreamforge was an American developer founded by Thomas Holmes, Chris Straka and James Namestka. The company specialised in strategy (and in particular) RPG games, producing titles such as *Menzoberranzan* and *Dungeon Hack* for SSI and the popular *Anvil Of Dawn* for New World Computing in 1995. Working at Dreamforge since 1994 was Mike Nicholson who contributed to games such as *Anvil* and the Roger Zelazny-scripted sci-fi adventure, *Chronomaster*. Today he works as a senior user interface designer at Blizzard, having most recently worked on *Diablo III*, but he still has fond memories of his time at Dreamforge.

"We were a very small studio and game development was drastically shorter back then," he recalls, "and in two-and-a-half years I actually contributed to five titles." Sometime in 1996, during a quieter time project-wise, Mike and some of his colleagues suggested an after-hours meeting with one of Dreamforge's founders, Chris Straka, to brainstorm new ideas. "We talked about what games we were playing, what we liked and didn't like, as well as what movies and television we'd enjoyed. After several hours of discussion, some common themes and influences began to emerge." The



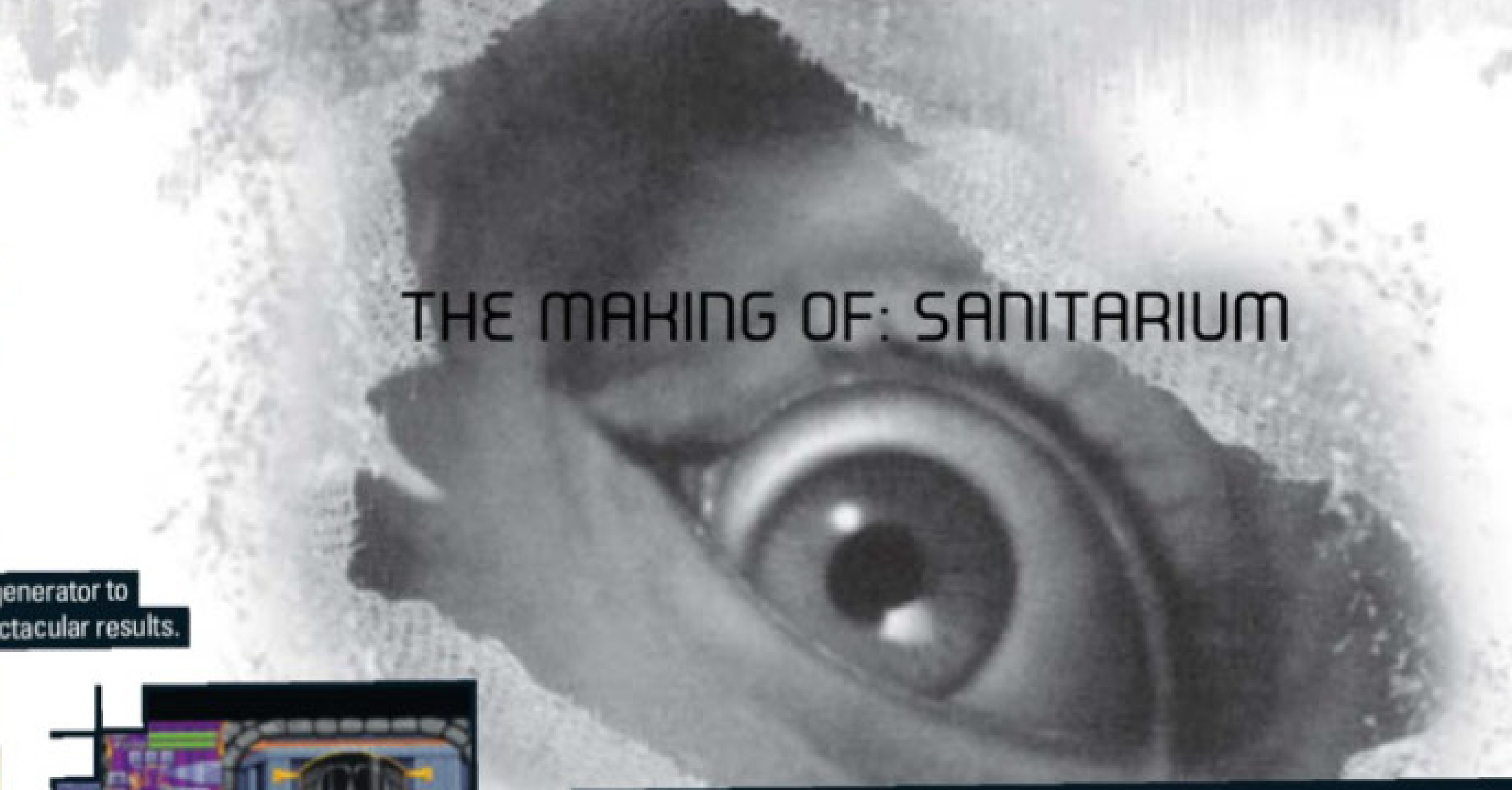
» [PC] In this abstract and nightmarish final level, Max must negotiate his way past this creepy ebony doppelganger.

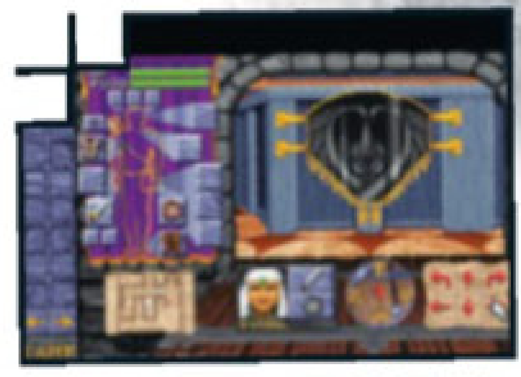


» [PC] Max, in the form of his sister, Sarah, gets closer to the real world.



» [PC] Wiring up the generator to mother produces spectacular results.



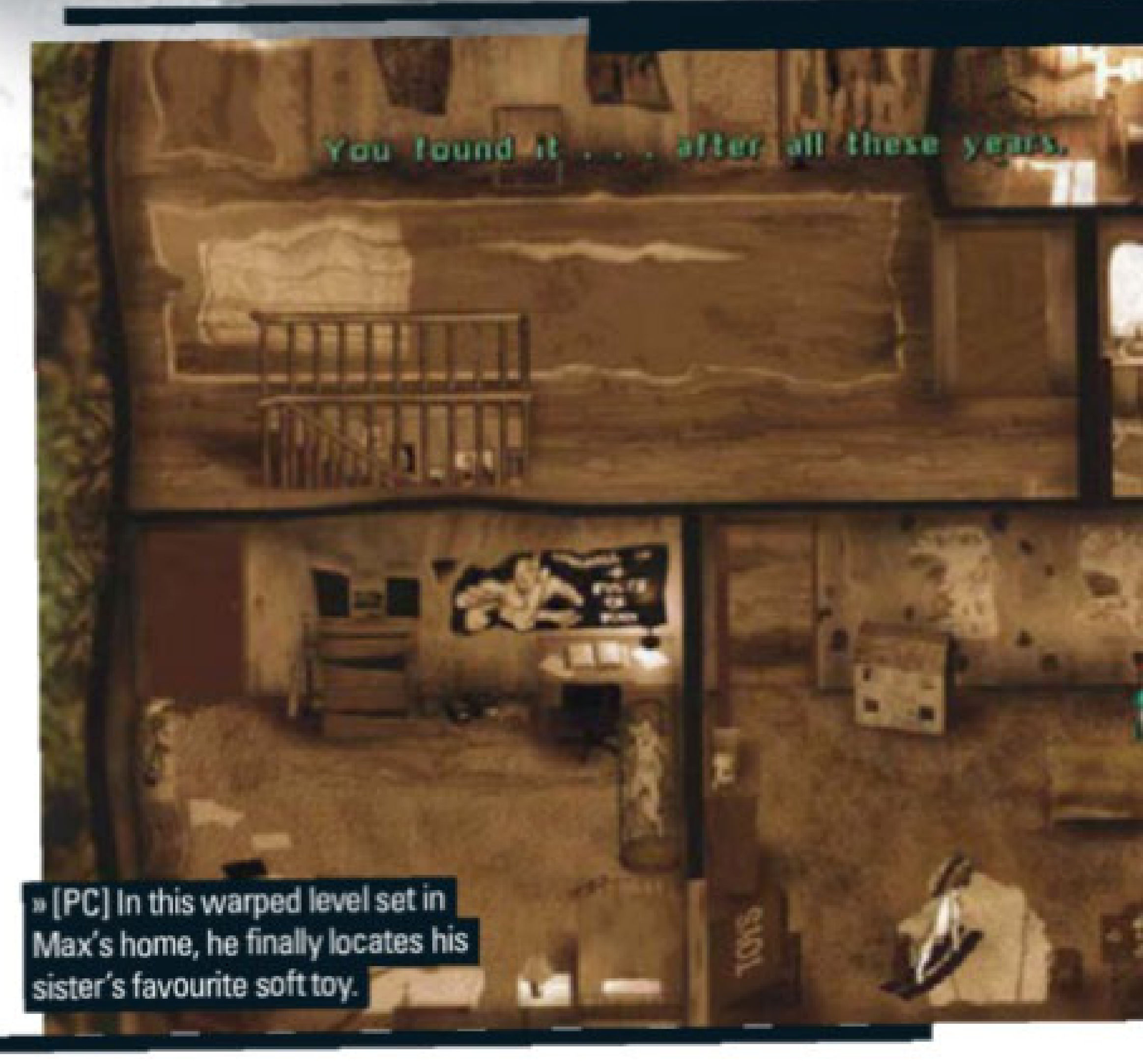


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ANVIL OF DAWN
SYSTEM: DOS, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1995

DUNGEON HACK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: DOS, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1993

WARHAMMER 40,000: RITES OF WAR
SYSTEM: WINDOWS
YEAR: 1999



» [PC] In this warped level set in Max's home, he finally locates his sister's favourite soft toy.

ARIUM

> **"We went to graveyards, a cathedral and checked out loads of material at the library"**
> Mike Nicholson on researching Sanitarium

television shows that had captured the developers' minds included the original *Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*; current movies discussed were *Jacob's Ladder, Seven* and Terry Gilliam's brilliant *Twelve Monkeys*. "And from a games standpoint we were huge fans of the LucasArts adventure games, particularly *Day Of The Tentacle*. So after several meetings we decided to mix everything we liked into a game we would love to play: a surreal and creepy adventure game," continues Mike.

With the game under a working title of *Asylum*, a design team including Mike, programmer Chad Freeman and art director Eric Rice began refining the basic core plot. Most of the team had little or no experience in games design. "Chris Straka and that initial meeting had worked out that many of the different ideas could still be incorporated but as psychotic episodes through the eyes of a mental patient," says Chris Pasetto who was brought aboard shortly after development began to refine all of the game's character and cinematic scripts. He's since worked for companies such as Interplay and Rockstar and has recently seen production commence on his first film script, *AIR*, which he co-wrote with Christian Cantamessa. He recalls Mike taking on the monumental task of scripting the game's dialogue and resulting dialogue trees, while composing background stories and bolstering each character's motives and themes. "Our goal was to give the ▶



» [PC] One of *Sanitarium*'s more taxing puzzles.



» [PC] What's a good horror game without a scary clown?



» [PC] An early cutscene and the first appearance of Dr Morgan.

7 DEFINING MOMENTS

The best bits that make Sanitarium an essential play



THE ACCIDENT

■ Driving too fast along a treacherous-looking road, Max speeds home to be with his wife and child. Suddenly the brakes fail and he's flung headlong into a vicious crash. So begins *Sanitarium*…



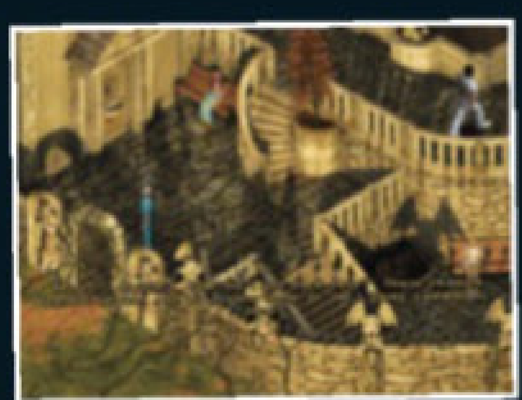
ESCAPE!

■ Trapped in a gothic asylum, Max needs to escape quickly as the generator chugs and swells towards an inevitable explosion. Activating the statue is the only way out, his first step in this nightmarish world.



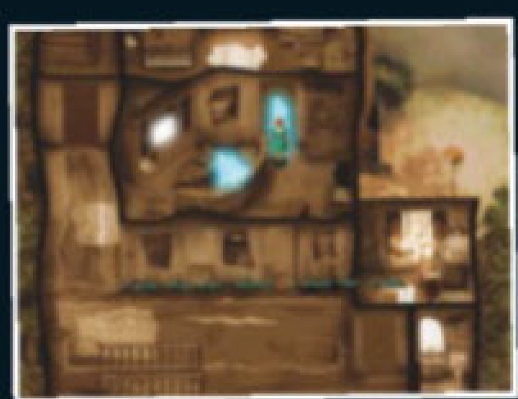
SARAH

■ Much of *Sanitarium*'s story is told via flashbacks such as this key moment. Max visits his sick sister who asks him to find her lost soft toy; yet despite a frantic search it is nowhere to be found.



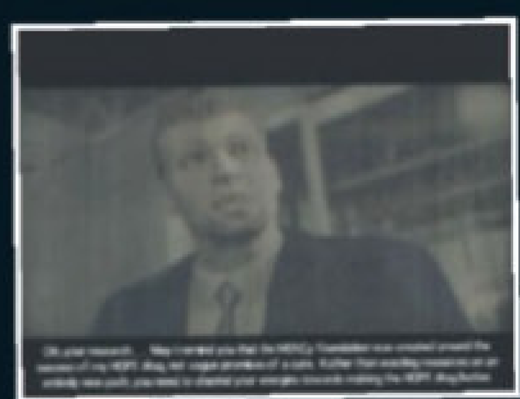
MEETING THE NOT-SO-GOOD DOCTOR

■ After rescuing the children from the malevolent Mother in 'The Innocent Abandoned', Max finds himself back in the Asylum. Here he has his first post-accident meeting with the seemingly benign Dr Morgan.



GHOSTS OF THE PAST

■ Transported into a vision of his old home, the fate of his sister and the effect her death has on his parents is revealed. Having taken on her form, Max discovers something thought lost in the attic…



THE DRUG VERSUS CURE

■ The source of Morgan and Max's differences is revealed as they argue over a cure for a disease. Morgan, blinded by money, wants to continue refining a drug that only eases the condition.

DOCTOR MORGAN

■ Max finally comes face-to-face with the demonic manifestation of Dr Morgan, and his final obstacle should he escape his nightmare. The hero must negotiate his way around a Venom-esque sludgy horror if he is to return to reality – and his family.



player the creeps," continues Chris, "and just seeing the early material and atmosphere the team was aiming for made me want to work at Dreamforge more than anything in the world."

With the basic plot outline in place, development of the game itself began with Dreamforge deciding a new graphics engine was required rather than converting an existing one. Many of the game's processes and ideas were originating artistically, meaning getting the presentation of *Sanitarium*'s world spot-on was vitally important. Consequently, research trips to strange locations were not unusual. "Yep, we went to graveyards, a cathedral and checked out loads of material at the library," remembers Mike, "and we even managed to get photos of some haunted tombstones. Western Pennsylvania had no shortage of creepy graveyards."

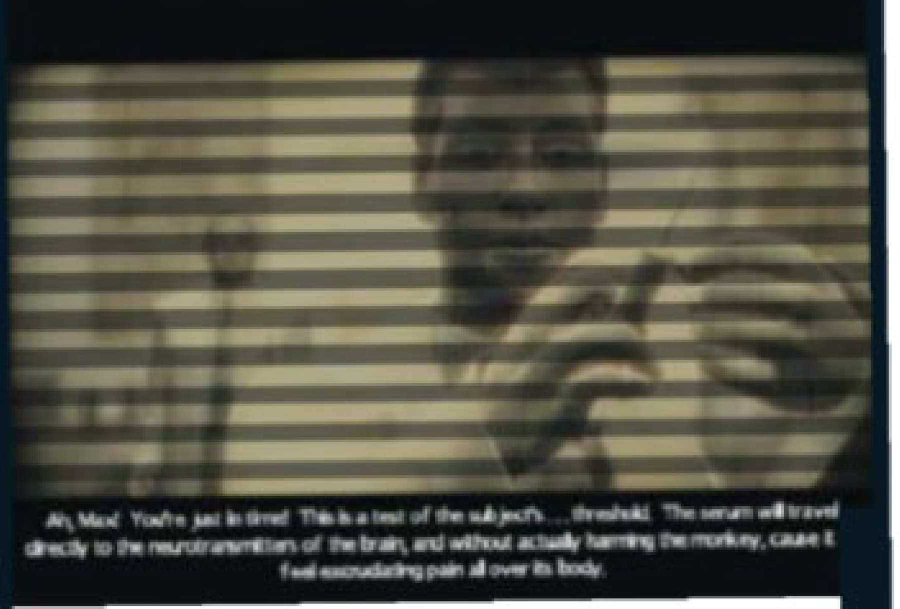
Back at the studio, the isometric camera view was proving problematic. Rendering *Sanitarium*'s huge landscapes and multiple viewpoints was a hugely time-consuming task, one Mike and Chris credit designer and graphic artist Tracy Smith with. The result was dubbed '5D', a mix of 2D and 3D art that in some ways encapsulated the struggle that point-and-click games had as the rest of the gaming world moved determinedly into the third dimension. In addition, the design team had even more grandiose plans, but ultimately Dreamforge's size and finances played a significant part. "We had planned the game as a modular system to allow ourselves an emergency exit," explains Mike, "should we need to cut anything out of the game, with minimum impact."

This idea led to the 'hub' based system of *Sanitarium* with Max as the central character and theme. Budget constraints limited its use and another area where Mike admits the game fell short was in combat. "When I started at Dreamforge I was able to play one of their earlier titles called *Veil Of Darkness*," he says. "And it incorporated a nice mix of adventuring and combat that I wanted to put into *Sanitarium*." It soon became apparent *Sanitarium*'s coders were already spread too thin and had enough on their plate simply making the adventure portion of the game work. "I had grand ideas for the combat," laments Mike, "but ultimately what resulted was a clunky point-and-click system that just didn't deliver the way I'd hoped, and proved to be nothing but a mere diversion from the adventuring and puzzles."

Ah, puzzles. This being the mid-Nineties, cacofiends were real cacofiends and puzzles were real puzzles. Like most developers, Dreamforge had to tread a fine line between appeasing the hardcore fans as well as casual players who would become frustrated and give up if they couldn't progress. For the most part, *Sanitarium* struck a good balance between the two viewpoints, but it came at a price. Mike says, "Initially the game was a lot more difficult. Then, during beta testing, word came back from the publisher that they would rather have an easier game with more mass-market appeal." He admits that, despite the request igniting some heated exchanges among the development team, it was 'probably the right call to make'. "Chris Straka also cautioned us that we were game developers and that puzzles we considered easy were difficult to the average gamer. Over the years I've witnessed first-hand that logic play out."

All throughout the development of *Sanitarium*, the focus remained on mood and atmosphere. "That was our number one priority and whenever new team members came on board, we really emphasised to them how important this was," says Mike. Additional plot was often added as the team sought to improve the intensity of the experience. "Believe it or not, originally Max's sister's death wasn't in the game," he reveals,

» [PC] Dr Morgan's horrible experiments are revealed in flashback.



» [PC] Solve the game and Max is reunited with his family.



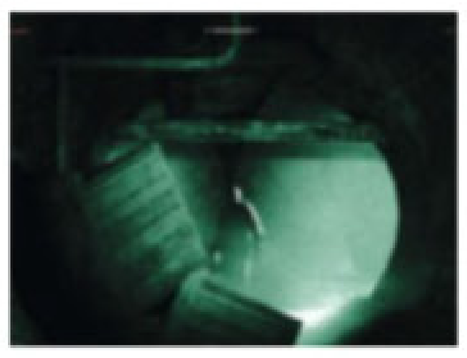
MENTAL MENAGERIES

The videogame asylums you won't want to leave...



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

■ Rocksteady's phenomenally successful take on the caped crusader won many plaudits upon release and deservedly so. Utilising an ingenious detective mode, the decision to base the game within the famous mental institution proved to be an inspired one.



OUTLAST

■ No conventional weapons, a found-footage style of presentation and gameplay based on evasion and hiding to progress; *Outlast* certainly does things differently and in doing so presents a compelling and intense experience.



COUNTDOWN

■ Accused of a crime he didn't commit, suffering (as usual!) from amnesia, *Countdown* is an early point-and-click adventure from Access Software that placed CIA agent Mason Powers in a Turkish mental prison, where from he must escape and prevent a terrorist attack.



ASYLUM

■ Originally released on the Video Genie and the Tandy TRS-80, *Asylum* took on a whole new when it made it onto the Commodore 64 in 1986. Utilising novel 3D graphics, it was essentially a text adventure, although a compelling one at that.



DEMENTIUM: THE WARD

■ Like Max, *Dementium*'s lead character is suffering from memory loss and trapped in a hideous mental hospital. Like *Sanitarium*, it owes a considerable debt to movies such as *Jacob's Ladder* and is one of the few adult-themed games on the Nintendo DS.

"but although I don't recall the exact 'aha!' moment of inspiration for it, I do recall that when we did a run through of that section it really affected the team." Sarah's death, caused by some un-revealed illness, is played out as a young Max searches frantically for her beloved soft toy. "Whenever you get a strong response you pursue it. Over the years that scene has always been the one that gets mentioned most by fans."

Unsurprisingly considering the discussions on *Sanitarium*'s plot and characters that had already taken place, the ending of the game caused much heated debate. So critical for such a powerful and story-driven adventure, Mike was determined that the player would not feel frustrated with an unresolved final chapter. "I pushed for what ended up in the game, so blame me if you don't like it!" He laughs. "But I felt very strongly that having invested so much in the characters, an unresolved ending would feel extremely cheap to the player. Ideally we would have had a far more lavish ending, but we worked with the time and budget we had."

Sanitarium had a relatively swift development, taking approximately 16 months from start to finish, and became a solid seller for Dreamforge and ASC Games, with Mike Nicholson mentioning a figure of 'around 300,000'. Like most major games it was thoroughly bug-tested prior to release, but not quite thoroughly enough, as there were soon many complaints from customers regarding a frustrating error early on in the game. The bug in question worked as follows. *Sanitarium*'s action system allowed for around ten active threads at once – which was considered more than enough. Should the player wander around the level performing multiple actions, such as startling the crows, these infinitely looping actions would fill the allocation up, preventing the player from further actions. Walking into a building was the most obvious action that disrupted gameplay, but in fact the player couldn't interact with any of the NPCs either. "It was very rare as you had to walk around the level ten times doing pretty much nothing to catch it," coder Robert Seres told us. "And it wasn't just a lock-out bug [as was generally reported]. It locked out *everything*."

> "Ideally we would have had a far more lavish ending, but we worked with the time and budget we had"
>
> Mike Nicholson

Despite the chaotic nature of its development, Mike and Chris look back fondly at their time on *Sanitarium*. "We were flying by the seat of our pants, without any set pipelines in place and everyone helping out where they could," smiles Mike, "and thankfully everyone was very patient with my clumsy attempts at writing until Chris came along." Chris himself is proud to have been part of the game, despite acknowledging its flaws. "I think it still holds up in a lot of ways. Sure, there's some rough edges here and there, but it's still a really engaging experience. Today I see some indie titles where the devs say they were influenced by *Sanitarium* and it's an awesome feeling being a part of something that's contributed to someone else's creative and professional development."

1998 was the year Valve gave the world the merciless killer-scientist Gordon Freeman. It also saw the release of a quirky, spooky little adventure game that was capable of unsettling even the most steadfast. "It's extremely gratifying to know I had a hand in giving so many people a memorable experience," concludes Mike, "and I can say without hesitation that *Sanitarium* made my career in videogames." Chris Pasetto says: "That first project is kind of magical for me. It was hard work, a lot of learning and a lot of mistakes. But magical." *

» [PC] A familiar re-align the pipes-style puzzle.



» [PC] Put X in the centre square!





GRAEME DEVINE

Meet Graeme. An intelligent model student who created a game for Atari and found his life turned upside down as a result. But, as he tells David Crookes, the one moment he found himself in trouble proved to be the making of him. More than 30 years on, he has no regrets

Graeme Devine was one of the original bedroom programmers of the Eighties. He began to code as a teenager and, by the age of 16, he was working for Atari and porting some of its existing games. As he became more experienced, he did what so many of his contemporaries did and set up his own company, Trilobyte. It went on to create one of the classic games of its day, the groundbreaking CD-ROM title, *The 7th Guest*, which made full use of this emerging medium.

Graeme has been hugely successful for more than 30 years. He worked with id Software on *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Quake III* and *Doom 3*. More recently, he worked on *Age Of Empires III* and was the writer of *Halo Wars*. He was also in charge of ensuring Apple iOS devices could play games well. Today he is the founder and CEO of GRL Games, which makes games for smartphones and tablets.

» [CPC] Graeme's first work for Atari was the porting of *Pole Position* to home computer platforms.



As a 48-year-old, you would have seen the early days of computing. When did gaming become a part of your life?

It was when I was in school. My dad brought a TRS-80 home from work in 1978 or so. Now, at the time there was *Battlestar Galactica*, which I loved. I wanted to make a movie of it and so I got the Revell model kit and made the Viper, went to school and cut the front covers off some *National Geographic* magazines to get the starry background I wanted. I put it all into a cardboard box, put the Viper up and got my 35mm camera. I took a bunch of pictures and I was really excited that it would come out and look like it was in space but it came out looking like crap. That's when I thought to myself 'I could do this on a computer' – that I could just make the film on a computer on the TRS-80. So I learnt how to program the Z80 in assembly code.

How did you learn to program?

By looking through *Byte* and *Personal Computer World* magazines. I slowly learnt how to reverse engineer the ROM and I programmed a game called *Space Junk 3D*, which had these spaceships that would go across the screen in two dimensions but had a three-frame, three-dimensional attack. You had to press the space bar at the right time to make the spaceships blow up, in one frame of animation. To me that was just awesome: four frames of animation total.

Did you sell the game?

I did. It was my first game on a TRS-80 and I sold four copies to my friends, so it was a massive seller. Actually, I think I just gave it to them. But it was the start and my introduction to Z80 assembly code.

What other computers did you use?

Well the Sinclair ZX80, the ZX81 and the Spectrum came out and those had Z80 processors in them as well so it was natural for me to learn to program those as well. I made a software assembler called Soft Mon and then I made my first game, which was called *Firebirds* that was published by Tim Langdell at Softek Software. I was maybe 14 or 15 at the time and it became quite a reasonable hit.

Were you proud of it?

Looking back, it has its charms. It was kind of based on *Galaga* and *Phoenix*. It earned me my very first royalty cheque: I remember getting £654 and it was enough to go and buy a Sony CDP 101 CD player, which was just brand new that month. I remember walking into some high-end audio place to go and buy this CD thing. I was a grubby teenage kid and there was all these rich people looking at the thing and umming and ahhing and not going for it because there was no content at the time. There were two CDs you could buy, you could buy Jean Michel Jarre's *Oxygen* and Beethoven's Fifth. I took out my £600, put it down – 'give me that'. It was quite a moment. I can also say, at one point in my life, I was one of the few people on the planet that had a copy of every single CD on the market.

As a teenager programming, were you thinking 'yeah, this will be a career for me in the future'?

No. I was still thinking towards university and computers were just really in their infancy. The Spectrum was awesome but it didn't seem like that was my career path at that time. I think like most 15-year-olds, you're not quite sure what your career path is going to be, but I started to get more and more involved in that world and going to ECTS. I met Jeff Minter and hung out with him and made more and more friends – friends I still have today.

So it was quite a compelling scene?

The time when that very first band of people were making games was extremely good. We were sharing stuff and encouraging each other. They would frankly tell you when stuff was crap. It was a fun time but it still didn't seem clear that it was my career path.

But did you feel like you were at the beginning of something?

I think so. I think that was clear among everyone because we were spending 24-hours-a-day programming. It became my life. All I did was program, program, program, then learn and absorb and look at the computer magazines with the Atari 400 and 800 on the front and salivate over them. I'd see how awesome *Star Raiders* was going to be and I would wish hard that I would get the cash needed to buy those machines.

If you didn't get into computers, what do you think you would have done?

I'd have been an astronaut. [laughs] I think that was the key thing – getting that first computer. I don't think I ▶



> At one point in my life, I was one of the few people on the planet that had a copy of every single CD
> Graeme Devine

FIVE TO PLAY

A look at some of Graeme's key games that you should be playing



XCEL

■ *Xcel* has some similarities to *Elite* on a superficial level. It involved locating a planet, guiding your ship to it and landing. But it was actually a shoot-'em-up, with an emphasis on exploring new lands and blasting away alien formations. Players had to find 30 installation planets created by a man-made race called the Sentinels. One reviewer said its controls and presentation reminded him of *Pole Position* – but that wasn't surprising perhaps given Graeme Devine worked on that game too.



THE 7TH GUEST

■ Graeme had a firm belief in the medium of CD-ROM and he was rather taken by the technology behind the CD-i in particular. His idea for *The 7th Guest* led to him setting up Trilobyte and the game became CD-ROM's killer app not least because the horror story, told from the perspective of the player, showed ambition and brand new techniques. Its revolutionary graphics, live action video clips and a point-and-click adventure format was more than enough to carry it to 2 million sales.



THE 11TH HOUR

■ Since *The 7th Guest* had sold so well and had been very well received by critics and consumers, a sequel was inevitable. *The 11th Hour* was set 60 years after the first game and it continued its theme with puzzle-based gameplay. It took nearly three years to make and ramped up the horror but, it has to be said, the plot was rather slow. Helping things along were treasure hunt sequences in which the players had to solve a riddle to find the right object.



CLANDESTINY

■ Graeme decided he wanted to create a third puzzle game at Trilobyte and this was it. Taking major cues from the previous two games, it continued the horror theme albeit from a more child-friendly angle. As the title suggests, it was also set in Scotland, Graeme's home country, although the accents could be difficult to understand at times. As expected though, the graphics were jaw-dropping and for those who had not played Trilobyte's other games, it felt fresh to a degree.



QUAKE III ARENA

■ As the designer for *Quake III Arena*, Graeme helped to make one of the best videogames of all time. A super-fast first-person shooter, *Quake III Arena* excelled during its frenetic multiplayer deathmatches. The game felt as if it had been taken down to the core of what a first-person shooter should be and it made it an instant classic. While Graeme had to adapt to working with another company, having struck out on his own, the result was certainly one to be proud of.



SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **FIREBIRDS** [ZX Spectrum] 1983
- **POLE POSITION** [Various] 1984
- **XCEL** [Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum] 1985
- **BALLBLAZER** [ZX Spectrum] 1986
- **METROPOLIS** [PC Booter] 1987
- **J R R TOLKIEN'S WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH** [Various] 1988
- **TURBO CHAMPIONS** [DOS] 1988
- **SPOT** [Game Boy] 1990
- **SILVER SURFER** [NES] 1990
- **WOLFENSTEIN 3D** [Various] 1992
- **THE 7TH GUEST** [Various] 1993
- **DOOM II** [Various] 1994
- **THE 11TH HOUR** [Various] 1995
- **UNCLE HENRY'S PLAYHOUSE** [Windows] 1995
- **CLANDESTINY** [Mac, Windows] 1996
- **QUAKE III: ARENA** [Various] 1996
- **QUAKE III: TEAM ARENA** [Windows] 2000
- **QUAKE III: REVOLUTION** [PS2] 2001
- **COMMANDER KEEN** [Game Boy Color] 2001
- **DOOM 3** [Various] 2004
- **AGE OF EMPIRES III** [Mac, Windows] 2005
- **DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL** [Various] 2005
- **HALO WARS** [Xbox 360] 2009
- **FULL DECK SOLITAIRE** [Various] 2011
- **DOOM 3: BFG EDITION** [Various] 2012

would have been in the games industry if it wasn't for that fortuitous event. I'd have been playing games but I don't think I'd have been making them.

Did you find programming much more enjoyable than playing?

Yeah. I think I still do to a certain extent. I would program with that Sinclair Spectrum and eventually the Atari and the Atari ST and the Amiga. I was picking up Fortran, stuff like that. If I could put my hands onto a computer I would immediately try to program it. I'd get games and press Control-C to break into them and look at the listings to see how they worked.

Was it the actual structure of the games, rather than the actual games, that fascinated you?

I like to look at something and think 'how would I do that? How would I solve that problem or get around that?' Back then computers only had 16K of RAM or if you had the super-duper one, 48K, but you really had to make everything run in 16K. The problem solving was very constrained. You only had a certain amount of memory and you had to do it in assembly.

Your work got you noticed and joined Atari at the age of 16, didn't you?

I saw a job advert for Atari in *Computing Today*. I applied and I took a demo of a 3D road to Atari's headquarters in Slough. I got the job. The problem was I was still at school but they asked me to port *Pole Position* to home computers. I'd soon find out that Atari could have a very direct effect on the health of a 16-year-old.

Why, was it quite intense?

They put a lot of pressure on me at one point to finish the game so I had to take a week off school to do it. When I came back I remember giving my chemistry teacher a floppy disk with the game on it. I was honest about it and I wrote a note to the school telling them I had taken the week off to work for Atari. Now, at this point I was a straight-A student, the guy who sat in the library at lunchtime rather than the one who hung outside and smoked cigarettes. I remember at the end of assembly being asked to see the headmaster. He said, 'well, I'm sorry, this is a bit too much, I can't have this kind of behaviour going on at the school, please hand in all your books. I'm going to have to expel you'.

What? Really?

Yeah. I was expelled from school for being honest. It was shocking for all the teachers and I was just so taken aback that I couldn't believe what had actually happened. That was the point when I decided not to go to university. I was 17 and coming up to my A-levels at this point and I just wanted to continue my career in the games industry and start my own companies. School had betrayed me.

What happened with your exams, though?

I ended up finishing off my A-levels externally. I'd already applied for universities by the time I was



» [Amiga] As well as leading projects, Graeme has been a production assistant on many games including *J R R Tolkien's War In Middle Earth*.





» *The 7th Guest* became a major reason for owning a Philips CD-i given its pioneering use of the CD-ROM format.

expelled and I remember visiting the University of London and the guy who taught programming there taking me to one side and asking why I had put the others universities down. None of them had a good computer programming course, he said, and he was impressed by *Pole Position*. He took me around the computer rooms which had those Tektronix displays that you saw in *Battlestar Galactica* and I was saying 'oh wow'. He actually gave me an FFF as entry level so all I had to do was fail my three A-levels. And still I didn't go. I wanted to get right into making games.

Did things work out well at Atari?
When Atari got bought by Jack Tramiel, I'd started working on *Ballblazer*. Atari called everyone down – maybe 200 of us in Slough. Everyone but 12 people were called down and everyone was like 'wow, they're going to lay off 12 people'. Nope! It turned out they were laying off 188 people and 12 were staying. So my first experience was to not have a job anymore.

But *Ballblazer* still got a release, didn't it?
At the time *Ballblazer* had started out as an Atari game with Lucasfilm Games. Lucasfilm Games reached out to me through Activision, which published the Epyx games in the UK. It wanted me to continue working on ports because the Spectrum version was looking good and I was doing the Amstrad CPC version. I got to understand the game and the techniques well so when it came to the PC and the Microsoft MSX versions, I was kind of the advisor guy. I got more and more involved with Lucasfilm Games and Activision.

Where were you living at this stage?
London. I was working at Joan Collins' apartment in London because that's where the Activision headquarters were. It was awesome because they had beer in the fridge but I was the only person that actually made games there. Everyone else was in sales and marketing or PR. I remember they sent me up to Manchester at one stage but I went through Heathrow Airport and got food poisoning. I got myself to hospital and, of course, the nurses were on strike and I couldn't get in but I fell down and eventually people came running out and I was really bad, I was in hospital for seven days. And Byron Turner, from Activision, came up and said 'I just quit my job at Activision because they wanted me to bring you a Commodore 64 so you could keep working in hospital and I said no'. I quit working at Activision too.

Wow. So what did you do?
I started my first company called Program Techniques with someone I knew from school. His cousin had a company in Covent Garden and we made the game *Xcel*. It was the first game I'd put out on my own so I learned everything about cassette tapes, publishing and advertising. I realised I was really good at making games but not really good at making cassette tapes. Our first royalty cheque was £28,000, though.

That's a nice sum for a teenager at the time…
It was but my friend's cousin took £25,000 out of the bank so that wasn't too nice. And then my friend actually got addicted to cocaine and it got pretty bad so I had to fire him and that was kind of the end of that company.

Time to move on then?
It was. I met someone called Paul Braithwaite in London. He was a PR specialist and he once told me, 'Graeme, never, ever, ever say that you're doing awful if someone asks how you are doing. When people ask, they want to hear that you're doing awesome.' I've always stuck to that advice. He introduced me to the people who helped me set up my second business, which was IC&D. That stood for Industrial Concepts & Design but always really Ice-Cream & Doughnuts. I was the person owning it and running it and he got me set up with good people to get the accounts and the VAT and everything going. I moved back to Crawley and back into my parents' house and started my company there. I employed Tim Ansell, who later started The Creative Assembly, and we started to make games together. We made *Metropolis*, *Turbo Champions*, *Enterprise* and a gazillion ports of different things.

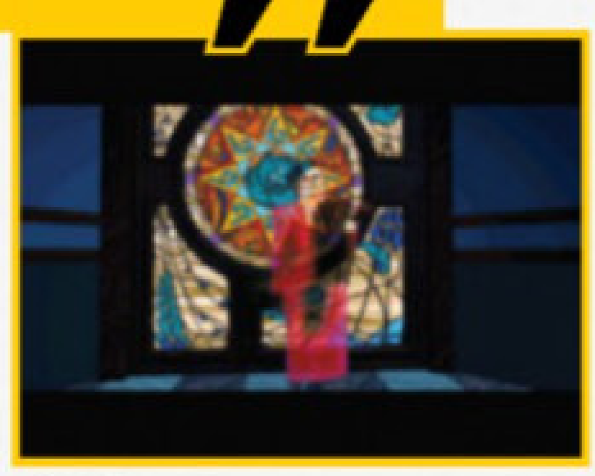
You published your games via Mastertronic, didn't you?
Yes, they became our publisher and we became their go-to people for stuff. An American would come along with a game that only ran on a Commodore 64 and we would look at it and say 'we can have that running on a Spectrum in four weeks, no problem'. So that was our job for a little [while]. Oh, and we had the tallest mountain of Coca Cola cans in the office.

Did IC&D do very well?
IC&D was doing okay but I think it would have gone on in the UK and only continued to do okay because our competition at the time were companies like Codemasters. But one day a publisher called Martin Alper called up and said 'we're starting this office in California and we need somebody to go across there and tell them how to turn on computers – no-one ▶

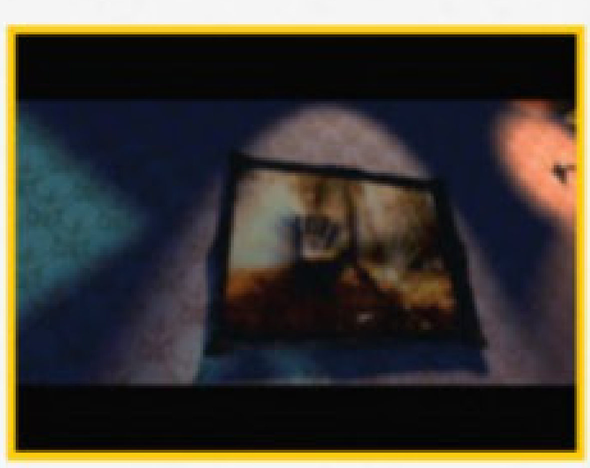
> "I realised I was really good at making games but not very good at making cassette tapes" Graeme Devine



» Graeme finds his family life more satisfying these days. Here he is enjoying time with his daughter.



» [PC] Real-life actors were used for *The 7th Guest* although Graeme had some blue screen problems.



» [PC] *The 7th Guest* was an adventure which some teeth-chattering discoveries.

In the chair with...



» Graeme seems very much at home surrounded by horror – a genre which inspired *The 7th Guest*.

> "All I did was program, program, program, then learn and absorb and look at the computer magazines"
> Graeme Devine

has any idea at all how to run any of the games or how to look at anything or even check them out and make sure they work alright'. I was supposed to go for six to eight weeks, just help get the studio running. That was 1988.

Was it a culture shock?
Everyone was in their 40s which is my age now but then I was 22 and I remember thinking to myself I am going to be on the first boat back in two weeks unless I make some friends here who are in my age group. At that point I didn't drink but across the road from my apartment there was a bar called Jasper's. I went across, learned how to drink American beer and met my wife. We were making games like *Spirit Of Excalibur* and *Vengeance Of Excalibur* and *J R R Tolkien's War In Middle Earth*. We did ports of *Double Dragon* and games like *Monopoly* and *Scrabble* and *Clue*. I think we were publishing a game a day at one point. I would get most of my money from Mastertronic by taking games that took up two floppy disks and making them fit on one floppy disk, because I was really good at compression. Then this thing started to come out to do with CDs.

Was this the moment you fell in love with CDs all over again?
Well, Rob Landeros and I started going to a whole bunch of multimedia conferences because CD-i was going to be the big thing. At that time on TV *Twin Peaks* was huge and we had the licence to Clue and so Rob Landeros and I started to plot around how we could go and make a David Lynch-like *Clue* game. I remember being at New York City Airport where we had a napkin and wrote the outline for this CD-based game. We went back to California and worked on the game design. It was turning out to be *The 7th Guest*. So we went to Martin Alper and said 'we want to make this CD-ROM'. He took us to lunch and promptly fired Rob and I. He said he didn't think it would make any money but that we should go off and form our own company to make it because it was important to embrace new technologies. For Mastertronic, CD-ROM was not the future. So we went off and founded Trilobyte.

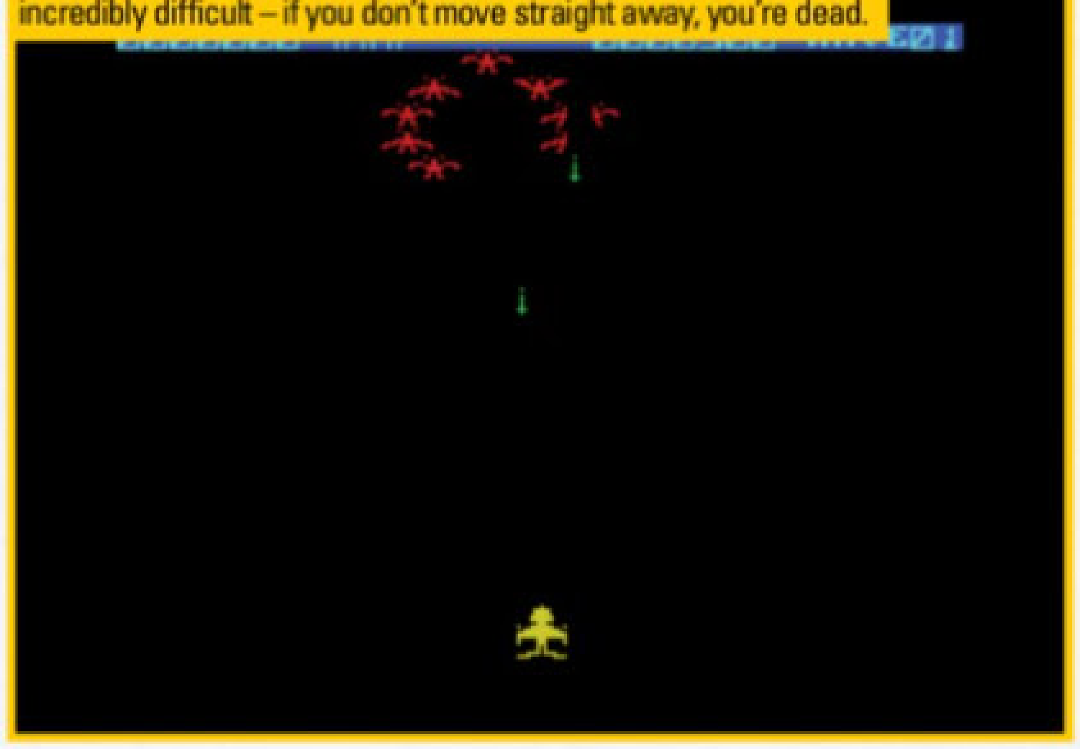
So were you convinced that CD-ROMs were the key to the future at that stage?
At that point we had clear vision that we could make moving video come from a CD-ROM and that we could make puzzles that would be interesting for people to play. It would be unlike any visuals that had ever been seen before. When *The 7th Guest* came out, there was no game with graphics like it. It was a reason to go and buy a computer and we were convinced that this was, overall, the right direction.

The game made extensive use of movie footage. How did you go about getting that all together?
We talked to a bunch of authors and in the end Matthew J Costello was the only one who agreed to make a script for us. We contacted a local director in Southern Oregon and he said he could do it but he'd never done blue screen so we made this blue screen thing out of violet paper and shot and filmed all of the footage above a comic book store in Midford, Oregon, in two days on Super VHS, with a fantastic group of actors and people.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Ballblazer* was an arcade shoot-'em-up which was published by LucasFilm Games, putting Graeme one step closer to a move to America.

» [ZX Spectrum] The *Phoenix*/*Galaxian* clone *Firebirds*, was incredibly difficult – if you don't move straight away, you're dead.



Were there any problems?
Our blue screen was terrible and one actor actually fell through it and tore it up so we had to put up blue tape. Then we had the huge technical problem of taking the blue out of all of the video and we couldn't actually do that because our blue screen was so bad and had so much red in it as well that it was actually impossible. The reason the ghosts in *The 7th Guest* have such bright auras around them is because our technology at the time did not let us take out all of the blue screen.

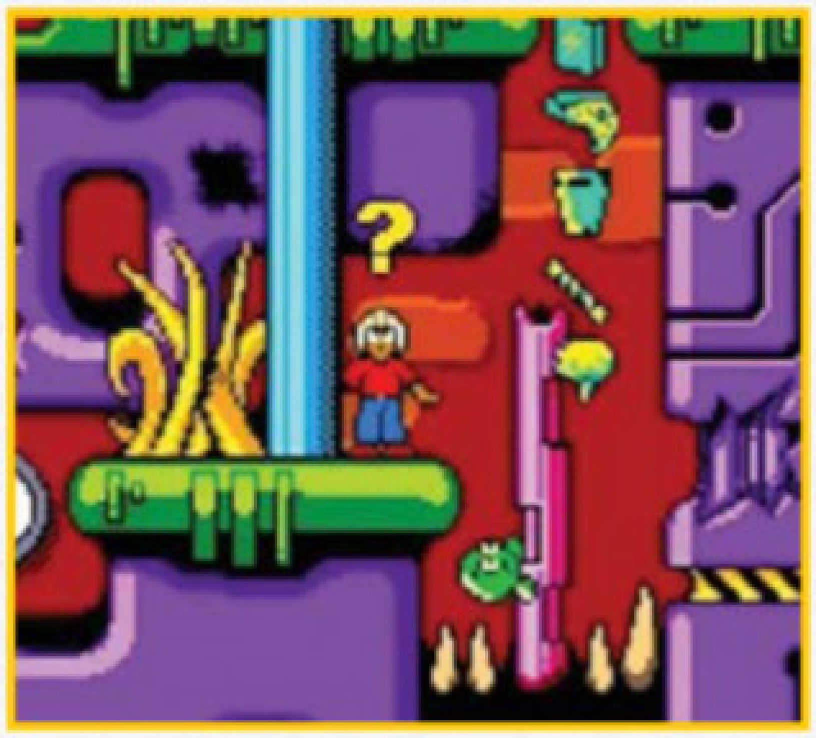
The game did very well – it sold 2 million. Was that turning heads?
Yes, it did okay! Nintendo bought the rights to the game because they were very scared that Sega would buy it for the Sega CD system. We actually got to meet Miyamoto. He came out to Southern Oregon and I had a barbecue with him at my house, sitting out looking out over the Rogue Valley. At that point he didn't speak any English, so there was also a translator.

Was Miyamoto pressuring you into a sequel?
No, he told us about his point of view on CD-ROM which he believed was never actually going to take off because a four-year-old could not put a CD into a console and be assured that it would work properly. Nintendo was all about four-year-olds being able to put a cartridge into their system and have that thing come on and be solid. For him CDs could go in upside down and that's one failure. They scratch easily and smear. That was enough fails at the time.

But you did make a sequel…
We had intended to move on and make a game called Egypt but Martin Alper called up and said we should make a sequel. But Rob and I lost our synchronicity on making the game. He started on *The 11th Hour* while I was still finishing *The 7th Guest* and we never got back in sync, ever. He went in a different direction than I would have gone in, just out of necessity, there's no blame. We got investment from venture capital because of the success of *The 7th Guest* and we really had no idea how to handle that. Rob's a fantastic artist, I'm a fantastic game programmer, we're both fantastic game-designers but we had no idea how to handle the influx of millions of dollars but we thought we did. We made more money from *The 11th Hour* than we did from *The 7th Guest*, though. But he had started to make *Tender Loving Care* and I started to make *Clandestiny*.

When Trilobyte closed, you went to work for id Software. You were going from owning a company to working for somebody else.
That's always weird but I don't think I ever thought of the transition in that way. I was coming to terms with having a three-year-old kid and a wife. I'd been constantly working for nine years and never really noticed that most valuable thing, my family, had been the thing that I hadn't been with. When I went to id I had a new outlook on life of family first. Anyway, I

» [GBA] Graeme has worked on many different platforms over the years, including handhelds.





» [PC] Graeme has made a good number of games for the PC, including *Age of Empires III* from 2005.

never thought of myself as working for John, I always thought of myself as working with John.

How different was working on something like *Quake III*, though?
So, so different but it was another time of fast focus on a game for a very short amount of time. We started off as 12 people and ended up as 17 people. We had daily play tests and we had daily arguments about the gun spread of the shotgun – should it have 10 shells or 12 shells, should it do 90 downage or 91 downage per shell? An absolutely incredibly creative time, making that game. Everything from adding the menus in, because John didn't want menus, to be able to add a single-player box in so that you could play it as a single-player and it wasn't just online. All these were huge, huge, huge design decisions inside the game, that seem obvious because all games have menus, all games have single-player modes, but they weren't obvious at all with *Quake III*.

Did you look back at the collapse of Trilobyte with regret, though?
I think the best point of my life was actually the failure of Trilobyte because it was the best and the worst. It hurt the most but now I hang out with my daughter every single day and I come home to my family and I'm still married 25 years later.

And you don't look back in anger to when you were expelled?
That's what kept me in the game industry, and I'm probably making games because of that.

In 2009, you were hired by Apple at the end of that decade in charge of looking at games for iOS devices. With the indie scene given a boost by smartphones and tablet, did it feel like going back in time?
Yeah and the same feeling exists at GRL Games which I run now. It does remind me of coming back to the Eighties and being that Eighties guy again except now I'm having my games sold in 92 countries across the world by Apple and royalty cheques are on time. In some ways it's a very different industry because the business part of it is all very clean now, it's assured, so that's much better for small developers. But yeah, I often think of the full circle thing and how it's actually been useful for me.

Is there a misty-eyed look at games, though, where we kind of think all the games in the Eighties were great? Did you feel frustrated at the relatively primitive tech you had to hand?
No. It was always the challenge of how do I fit that into that? How can I make that smaller? That's one of the disappointing things I see in programming nowadays, is that someone will just go and make a 2GB array of data just because they have 2GB around. And there's so many ways to do this better, you could do this in 2K if you thought about it and actually worked on it a little bit. Games were great back then.



» [Xbox 360] Graeme's work has spanned more than 30 years and he has been involved in some major contemporary projects including *Halo Wars*.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS



Graeme turns superhero when he goes to buy a coffee…

MERMAN: Do you think it was right for *Quake III* to concentrate so much on multiplayer without providing the strong single-player mode story?

Absolutely. People still play *Quake III* today and, it's one of the most well-balanced multiplayer experiences that you could have on the planet because we focused on that and we made that awesome. We could have divided our focus and made a single-player story-based thing as well as the multiplayer game but it wouldn't have been the fantastic multiplayer experience that was *Quake III*.

MANCMAN: Seeing as most PCs at the time had floppy drives were you worried at all about making *The 7th Guest* available exclusively for CD-ROM?

Well, we were told to make a floppy disc version! But yes, it was obviously a huge risk because there were no CD-ROM drives out there at the time. We bet the farm on it being the future and fortunately it became a standard.

CRUSTO: Do you wish you had designed *Half-Life 2*?

Nope. If I did it, it wouldn't be the great game *Half-Life 2* is. That would be a different game. I would like to make a game with Valve someday because their process sounds innovative.

POSTLEDOC: Were you disappointed with how *The 11th Hour* turned out?

Never! I was disappointed that we never quite got in sync for the game and I think that led to the company falling apart, or at least had the seeds of that. But I can't live by the past only learn for the future.

JDANDDIET: Do you get annoyed when people spell your first name incorrectly?

Only at Starbucks, I've learnt to go with the backup name of Batman because that one always works.



» RETROREVIVAL

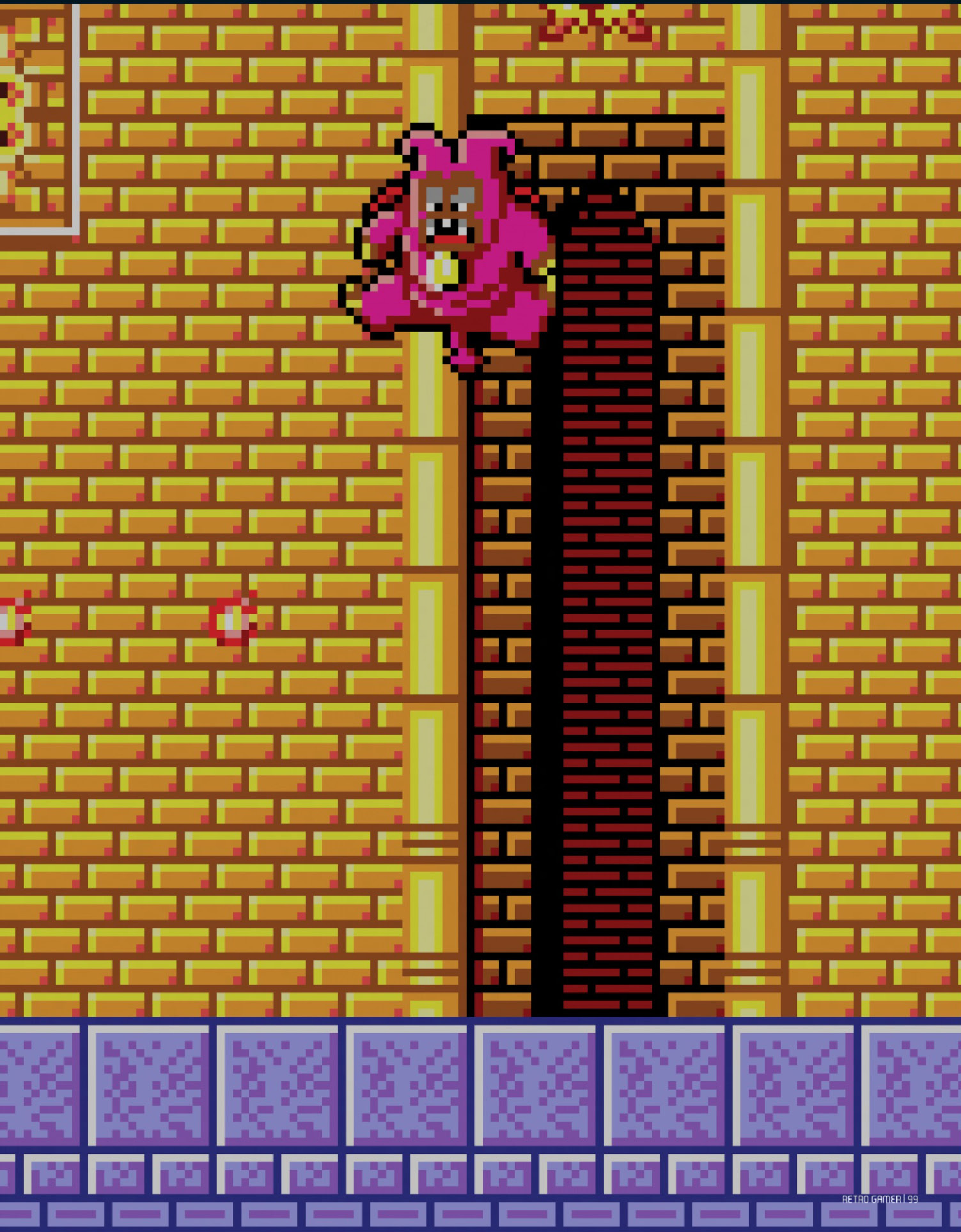
Wonder Boy In Monster Land

BUSINESS IS ABOUT TO PICK UP HERE!

» Master System » Sega » 1988

The first steps of a big adventure are always exciting, particularly when you're a child, and *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* was the first game I played that had the qualities we typically associate with RPGs. While it was fundamentally similar to the platform games I'd previously played, it offered something that they didn't, with currency, upgradeable equipment and a world that, while linear, was still exciting to explore. Every time I turned on my Master System and took a sword to those early snakes, it felt like I was starting an epic journey. Locations such as the town overrun by mushroom enemies felt just that bit more real, because I could go into shops and interact with other characters.

Unfortunately, being a small child, I was rubbish at games and never quite beat the final dragon. But of course I know what happens at the end, and I knew long before the internet and its plot-spoiling powers got their hooks into me. *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* is well-known for repeating *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*'s final stage as its first stage, allowing the plot to continue directly from the events of its predecessor. It was a great move – rather than just being told what happened, I was shown the hero's fate. It's all too rare that we feel like our in-game actions matter, but that direct continuation made my younger self feel like what I did in Monster Land had mattered – even if I only beat the final boss when it was a first boss. *





>> It's remake city this month. We check out the new versions of Another World, revisit the old Spectrum classic Slightly Magic, and see if the Ratchet & Clank trilogy is worth getting on Vita



» [Wii U] In addition to firing lasers, you can create shields and create powerful charged shots that break through walls.

Another World 20th Anniversary Edition

ÉRIC CHAHI'S SCI-FI CLASSIC HITS NEXT-GEN SYSTEMS

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII U
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, PS4, PS VITA, XBOX ONE
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £7.19
- » **PUBLISHER:** DIGITAL LOUNGE
- » **DEVELOPER:** DELPHINE SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» Érik Chahi's superb adventure was first released in 1991 and instantly drew acclaim from those that played it. Many assume that its sequel is *Flashback*, but it's actually the Mega CD exclusive *Heart Of The Alien*, which was released in 1994.

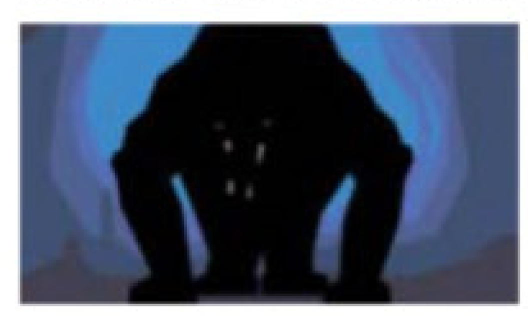


For a game that's completely without speech, *Another World* manages to be surprisingly emotive. From the moment Lester's Ferrari roars into view and the orange-haired scientist sits down to begin work on his top-secret project you're hooked. Éric Chahi's game is captivating from the get-go, dragging you into its surreal and stark world, while there's a touching relationship at the core of *Another World* that elevates it above many similar games of the time. Hideo Kojima and Fumito Ueda are just a couple of developers to have been influenced by Chahi's game and *Another World*'s DNA can be clearly seen in both *Ico* and the *Metal Gear Solid* games.

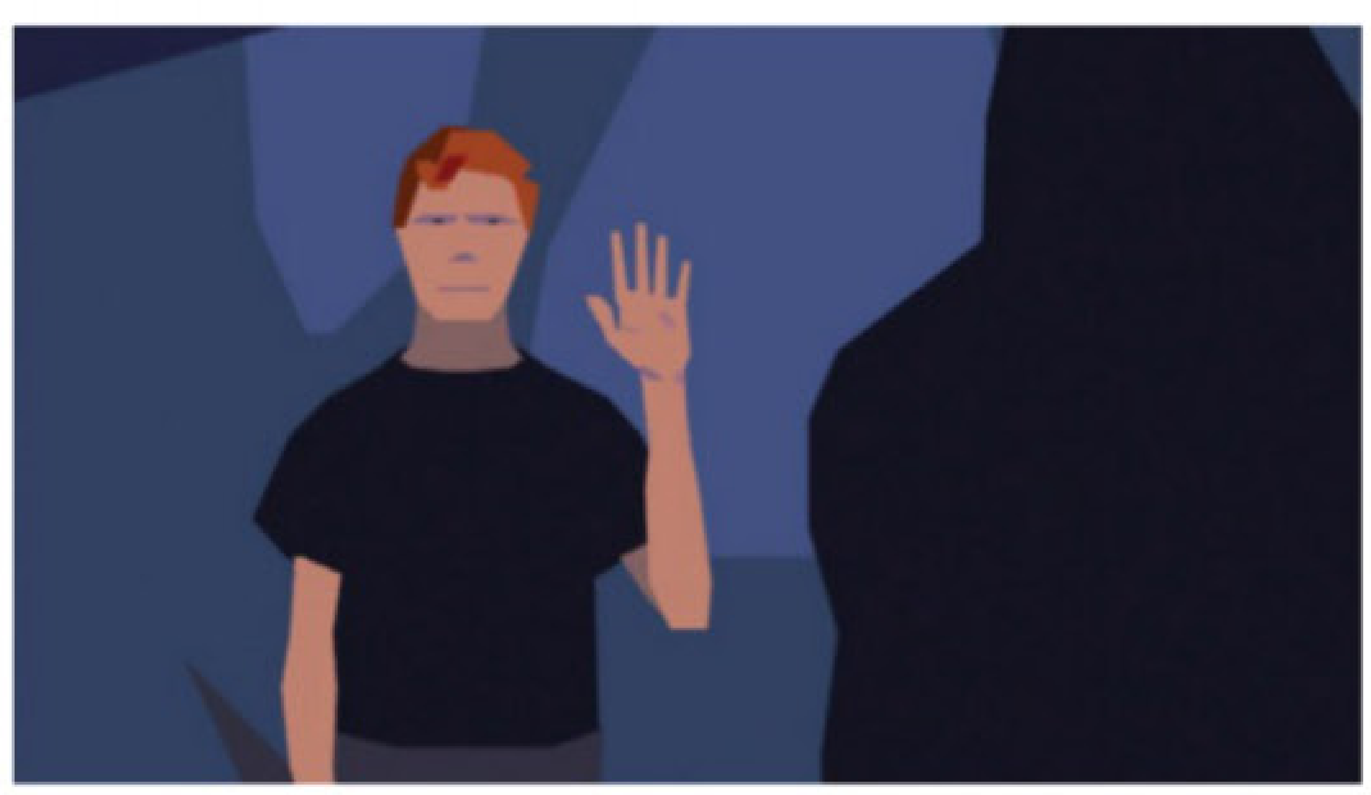
You'll have most likely experienced Lester's journey many times now, but you'll still find your heart stuck in your throat at certain parts of the game – mainly because its structure is so solid, while its cutscenes resound so deeply with you, the player. Chahi built his game as many might plan a movie, and its narrative always drives the on-screen action forward, creating a tense unique experience that still holds up today. The cutscenes too remain highly emotive allowing you a clear insight into the amazing world that Chahi has created.

And yet, there's more to *Another World* than bold cinematic cutscenes and tight narrative. One of its greatest strengths is its sheer ballsiness to cram the structure of a point-and-click adventure into an action game. Like many adventures of the time there's a trial-and-error process that many of today's gamers will no doubt find grating. As with any adventure however,

» [Wii U] He's still as terrifying as you remember. Getting past him is one of the first puzzles of the game.



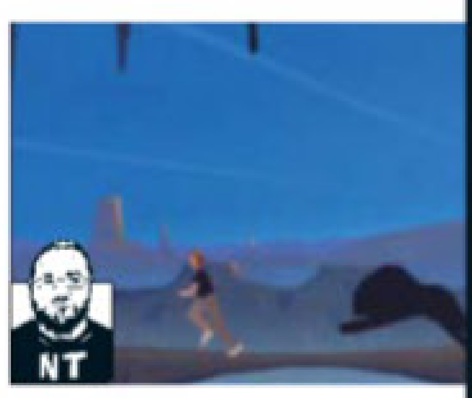
» [Wii U] The cinematic cutscenes still work exceptionally well, conveying a great sense of drama.



* PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Ratchet & Clank Collection
A solid update of a trilogy of games that never seem to get the love they deserve. Recommended.



NICK
Another World
It has certainly aged in places, but the atmosphere created by Éric Chahi's game is still impressive.

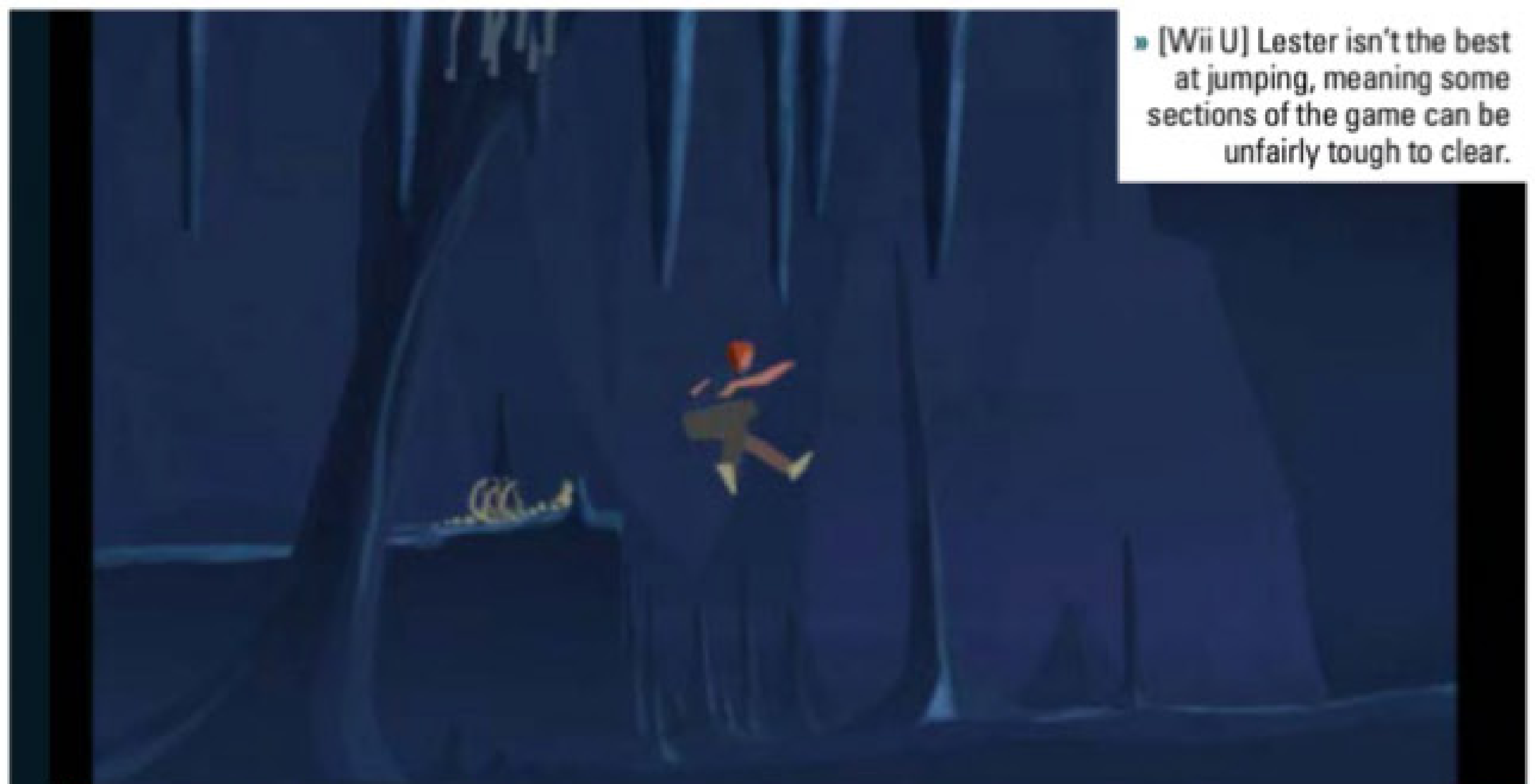
it's all about solving the puzzles, typically by dying several times before you work it out. It's nowhere near as frustrating as it sounds though, and as play progresses you soon fall into the same mindset of Chahi, solving the puzzles organically as they present themselves.

Danger is around every corner of *Another World* and before the game even begins you'll have most likely been dragged to a watery death before you can work out what's happening. And let's not forget the black beast you encounter a few screens in – a nemesis that many claim to have never passed! Experimentation like many other games is the key to success, and by continually testing the limits of Lester's fragility and the dangerousness of opponents you begin to get a better feel for his place in the hostile world Chahi has created.

It's a pity then that Lester isn't the most athletic of men, hampered by controls that – while hardly clunky – aren't as fluid as you'd like. It doesn't help that *Another World* appears to be a platformer, meaning gamers expect a certain amount of control from their main character. While Lester is no slouch, certain jumps can be difficult to pull off, which would be fine, if their failure didn't result in an instant death. Fortunately, *Another World* boasts sensible checkpoints, meaning that if you do get stuck on a particular section (and you will) there's never a lot of backtracking to reach it again. There are other little annoyances as well, like how some characters might continually shoot at Lester, only to ignore him when he respawns – but for the most part, instances like this are few and far between and rarely ruin your enjoyment.



» [Wii U] While we're not a massive fan of the smoothed out graphics they can be switched off for more pleasing pixels.



» [Wii U] Lester isn't the best at jumping, meaning some sections of the game can be unfairly tough to clear.

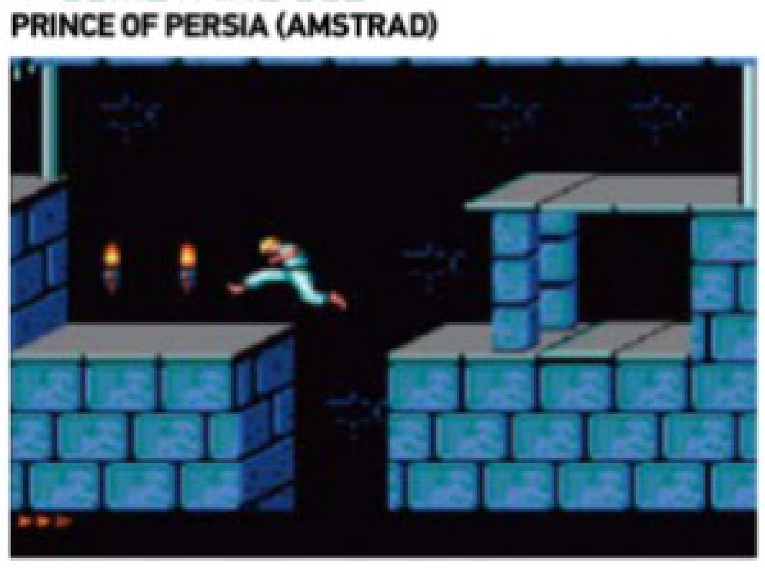
The puzzles are also fairly balanced and rarely ruin progress. They don't feel as obtuse as many games of the time, and it's a case of playing around with Lester's options until you work out how to continue. And let's face it, even if you do get stuck there's 20 years of tips to draw from.

Which leads us to perhaps to the most disappointing aspect of this classic game, and *Another World is* a classic, there can be no denying that. Considering it's such an important milestone, there's been surprisingly little done to this update. The most notable is obviously the enhanced graphics. While we're not huge fans of the smoothing filter that's been used on the characters, locations generally have a little more life to them. Fortunately, a quick stab of the Y button lets you switch between the new graphics and the original visuals of 1991. *Another World*'s music has been given plenty of attention, featuring the original soundtrack, the enhanced CD-ROM version and remastered sound effects. There are also three difficulty levels included, while the Sony versions are all cross-platform. Interestingly, there's no touchscreen support for the Wii U version, even though the game is perfectly playable via the GamePad.

There are certainly aspects of *Another World* that have aged, but it's still a delight to play. This isn't the greatest update in the world, but it does allow owners of newer consoles to experience a true classic.

★WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
PRINCE OF PERSIA (AMSTRAD)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
LIMBO (XBOX 360)



In a nutshell

The trial and error gameplay will annoy newcomers, but there's no denying *Another World* is an expertly crafted adventure. If only a little more work had been done to this latest edition.

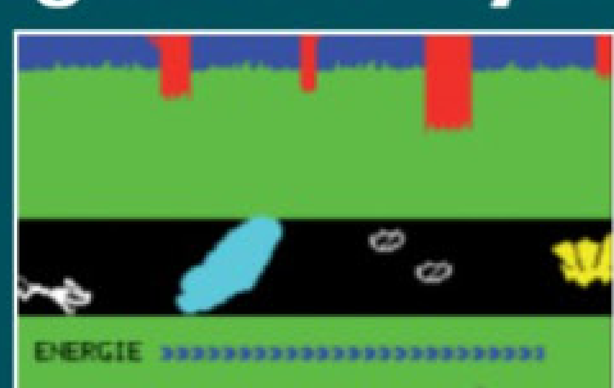
>> Score **78%**

More Éric Chahi games to try…



Frog

Eric's first published game is certainly a simple one, but one that's still good fun to play. The aim is to catch flies while avoiding angry wasps. It's a simple idea, one made trickier by your ever-decreasing energy bar that can lead to you making silly mistakes.



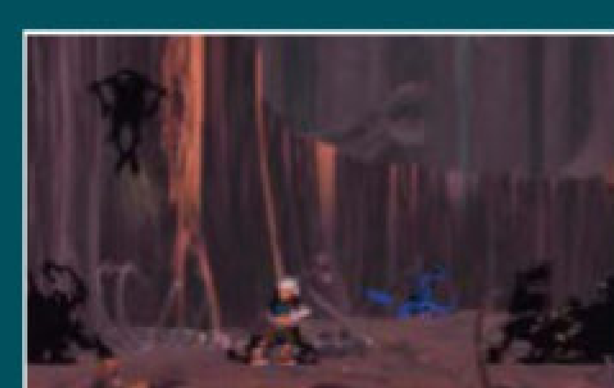
Doggy

Don't be fooled by the bright colours, as *Doggy* is a punishing game. Guide your cute dog along a hazard-strewn path before you run out of energy. Great graphics and tight controls make it Eric's most accomplished Oric-1 game. He was just 17 at the time.



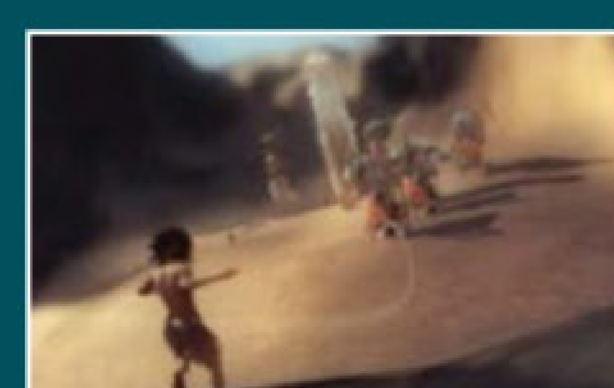
Infernal Runner

At first glance *Infernal Runner* appears to be a *Lode Runner* clone. It's far more brutal however. Pretty much everything in the game kills you, while jumps require extreme precision. It's a little too tough for its own good, but you'll still find yourself returning for another go.



Heart Of Darkness

A massively ambitious game from Chahi starring a young boy and his inquisitive dog. While it boasts stunning animation and a sweeping soundtrack the difficulty is far too punishing and certain parts of the game are a real slog to get through.



From Dust

Eric Chahi returned from a self-imposed game exile to deliver this imaginative strategy game. Playing a god-like figure you must mess around with different elements to fulfil missions and keep your tribe happy. What *Populous* would be if it was released today.

RETRO ROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download



✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

INFORMATION
» **System:** PC (tested), Mac, Android, iOS
» **Buy it for:** £2.99
» **Buy it from:** Google Play, App Store, Potassiumfrog.com



Slightly Magic: 8-Bit Legacy Edition

The highlight of *Slightly Magic* is easily the charming director's commentary that's been included as a bonus feature. It's a wonderful touch giving a brief insight into *Slightly*'s creation, where Colin explains his relationship with Codemasters, the importance of the original opening screen and why the 16-bit versions aren't as nice as the original Spectrum game.

The game itself remains great fun to play, being an arcade adventure in the style of the popular *Dizzy* series. The big difference however is that in addition to being able to carry normal objects, Slightly can also create spells that will enable him to bypass hazards or even turn into different animals. You'll have to recover Slightly's wand and spellbook first however…

Control-wise *Slightly Magic* is nice and responsive and feels just as tight as its original Spectrum incarnation. The sedate nature of the gameplay means there's no reliance on difficult pixel jumping, meaning you can simply enjoy *Slightly*'s many puzzles. The spells themselves add an extra dimension to the gameplay, requiring you to combine two different objects together to turn each spell on. You then need to find the relevant item or person to use them on.

One thing we do love about *Slightly Magic* are its fantastic graphics. At first glance they appear to be nothing more than the original Spectrum sprites, but you soon realise that they lack any of the colour clash found in the original game and have been suitably enhanced. Bold, chunky and colourful, they work extremely well giving the game a neat, distinctive look. The soundtrack delights as well, being a remix of the Spectrum original that, while constantly looping, never manages to annoy.

72%

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

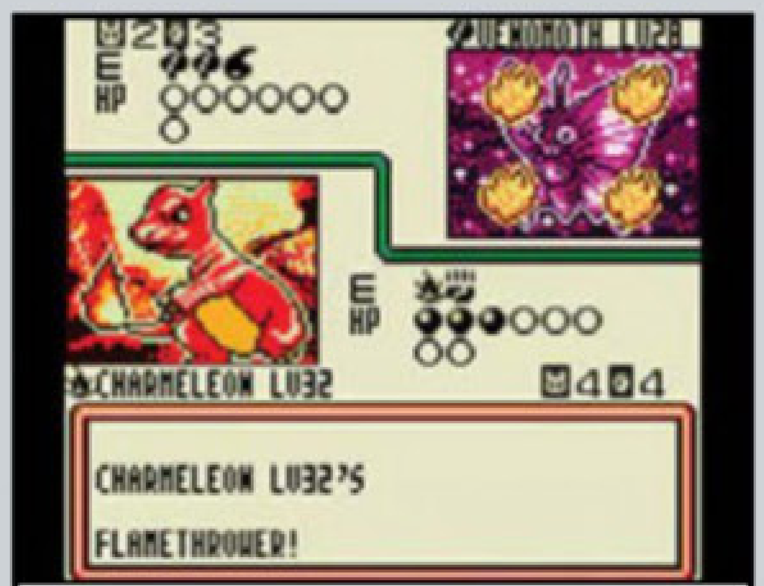


PixelJunk Shooter Ultimate

» **System:** PS Vita (tested), PS4
» **Buy it for:** £9.49
» **Buy it from:** PSN

If you've not had a chance to play *PixelJunk Shooter* yet then you've missed out on one of the most interesting games in the series. While it has shooting mechanics at its heart, it's just as much a puzzle game as it is a blaster – in particular when it introduces the different elements you can interact with. It's particularly well-suited to Vita too thanks to its original bite-sized structure and *that* screen.

80%



Pokémon Trading Card Game

» **System:** Game Boy Color
» **Buy it for:** £4.49
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console (3DS)

The biggest draw of Hudson Soft's game originally was its excellent multiplayer mode. This was crucial, as the computer opponents were a little too easy, meaning there was very little challenge on offer. It's a shame then that it's missing from this re-release, ripping out a large part of what made Hudson Soft's game so enjoyable in the first place. The deck building is still enjoyable, but the lack of challenge is a real issue.

68%

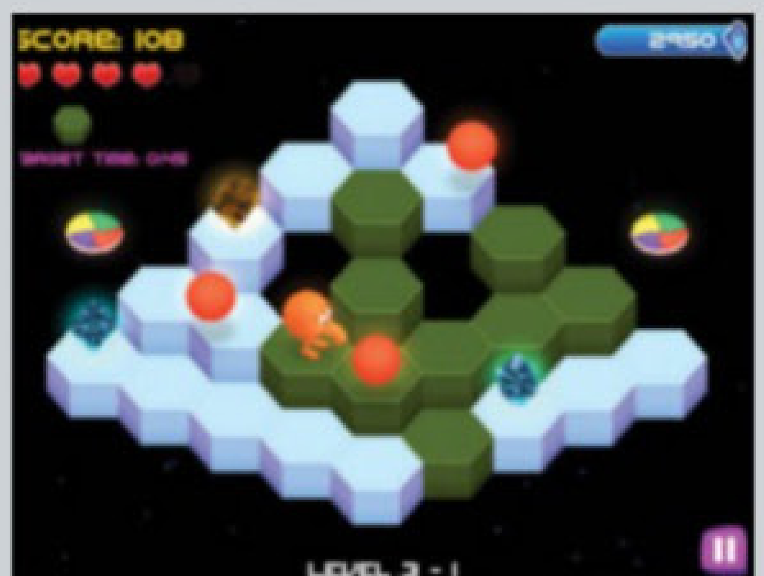


Sonic Jump Fever

» **System:** iOS (tested), Android
» **Buy it for:** Free (in-app purchases)
» **Buy it from:** AppStore

Sonic's latest iOS game has embraced the full evilness of in-app purchases creating a game that's isn't concerned with offering fun and just wants to take as much cash from you as possible. It's a real pity that Sega has gone down this route, as it was better applied in *Sonic Jump*. The gameplay is as good as ever, but the way it constantly bombards you with cash requests and ads will soon have you reaching for the delete button.

30%



Q*Bert Rebooted

» **System:** PC (tested), iOS
» **Buy it for:** £4.99
» **Buy it from:** App Store, Steam

This is interesting. While the core gameplay is sound, there are some irritating design choices that will no doubt put many off. The default control systems are extremely annoying, but it's the progression structure that irks us the most. Each level has three challenges, but you can only ever unlock one at a time, meaning pointless replays. The original game is also included. A fun-enough update hampered by odd decisions.

62%

Ratchet & Clank Collection

» **System:** PS Vita » **Buy it for:** £29.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail, PSN

It's quite amazing how all three *Ratchet & Clank* games have been squeezed onto a single Vita memory card. Insomniac Games has worked closely with Mass Media Inc to ensure its trilogy doesn't suffer from the frame rate issues that plagued the *Jak & Daxter Collection*. The end result is that this sits somewhere between the *God Of War Collection* and the *Sly* collection in terms of overall quality. Visually it again feels a little drab, but it's an otherwise acceptable port (although the sound quality occasionally takes a hit). The games themselves hold up equally well with plenty of action and mayhem as the duo unleashes all sorts of over-the-top weaponry. While the original is arguably the weakest in terms of ideas and structure, it still holds up well and is fun to play, with only the awkward touchscreen strafing letting down the latter two games. A highly entertaining collection, particularly if you missed them the first time around.

78%



Welcome to Homebrew



>> Each year the Atari 8-bit community has the Kaz Kompo which is a chance for players to vote for their favourite games. The most recent was for titles put out during 2013 and there were over 80 released during that 12-month period. Since some of them didn't get much publicity its worth a look at Kikstart.eu/kaz-2013-a8



» [PC Engine] One craft that never needs washing.

BESIDE MYSELF WITH GLEE

Defender and fish, together at last

The planet Atlantis is a world where everybody has been happily living underwater for centuries after its cities were submerged. But now their idyllic, sub-aquatic lifestyle has come under threat from the evil Aquanoids, a robotic species whose idea of fun is to drag away the entire population of the planet to convert them into biomechanical monsters. But as is usually the case, one brave captain and his submarine – which is also a mechanical fish – are the last hope for the planet and possibly the universe as well.

The gameplay is *Defender*-style scrolling and shooting action with the lone hero trying to protect a group of his people from the machinations of those invading Aquanoids but, rather than flying along above the usual planet surface, the game's action is set deep beneath the waves of Atlantis. At the time of writing the preview video and screenshots of *Atlantean* over at developer Aetherbyte's website – which can be found behind Kikstart.eu/atlantean-pce – are only work in progress previews, but the text promises much more including boss fights and the developer has told us that it has already got the game working far more smoothly.

There are some colourful and detailed graphics on show – we particularly liked the grumpy-looking anglerfish mooching around the screen – while the scrolling moves with multiple layers of parallax and the action is accompanied by a solid soundtrack. And just in case that wasn't enough, *Atlantean* is going to be the first release on AbCARD, Aetherbyte's homebrew clone of the PC Engine's HuCARD cartridges. The developer has been working on the game for over a year and the estimated release date appears to be around now, so shoot-'em-up loving PC Engine owners should soon have something new to get their teeth into.

> "We particularly liked the grumpy-looking anglerfish mooching around"

Incoming

Maze Of The Mummy on C64 and the adventure Questforge have caught our eye this month

KIKSTART.EU/MAZE-MUMMY-C64



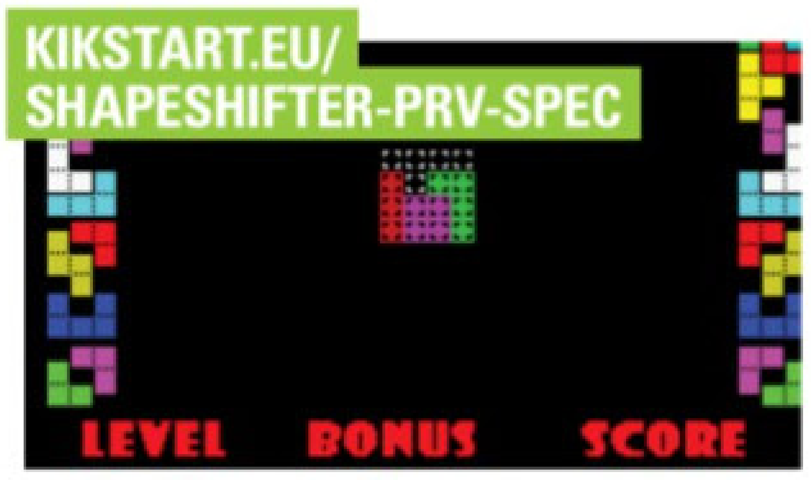
▲ The recent preview of *Maze Of The Mummy* for the C64 looks interesting and already includes 15 levels.

▼ Grab a sword and do some exploring with *Questforge* on the Atari 2600 from indie developer Ludosity.



KIKSTART.EU/QUESTFORGE-2600

KIKSTART.EU/SHAPESHIFTER-PRV-SPEC



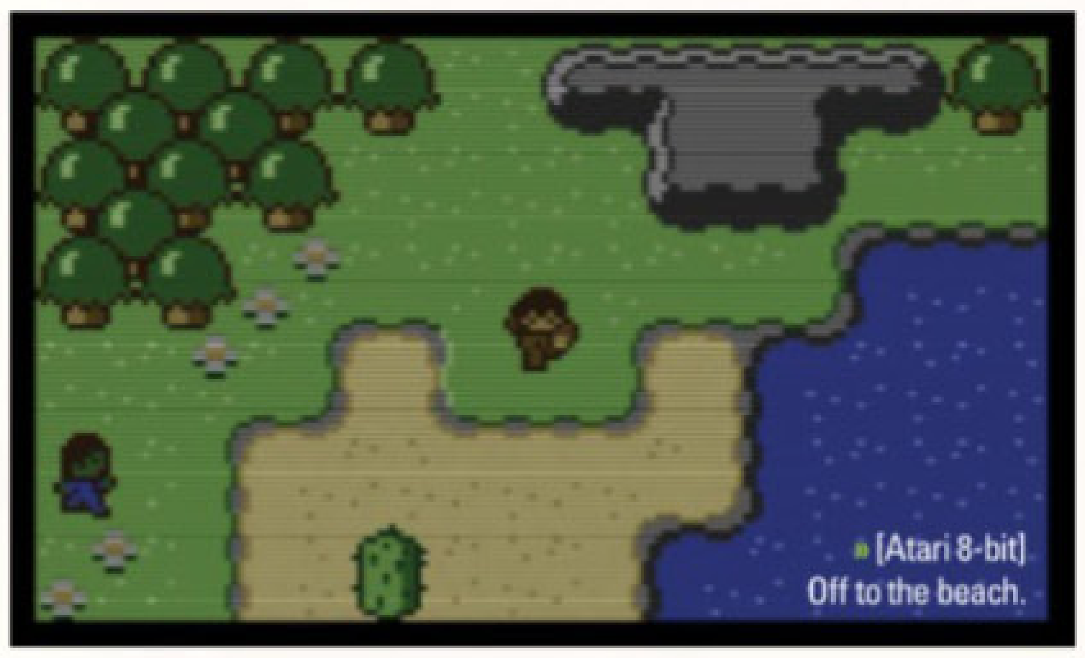
▲ Coming very soon from Cronosoft, *ShapeShifter* is a puzzle game for the ZX Spectrum.

PIECING IT TOGETHER

***Assembloids* on the** Spectrum by Martin 'Enthusi' Wendt is a conversion of his own C64 game from 2013, an action puzzler which was in turn based on the Flash game *Quartet*. The game has five windows on-screen, with chunks of robot face in the central space that need to be shifted to one of the other four to assemble metal mugs. The idea might be quite simple but there's a strict time limit. Kikstart.eu/assembloids-prv-spec goes to the World Of Spectrum thread about *Assembloids* which includes some impressive screenshots.



» [Spectrum] Requires some assembly.

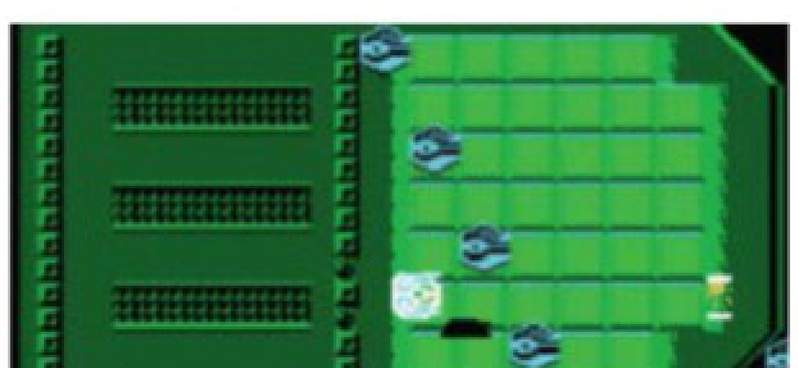


» [Atari 8-bit] Off to the beach.

TOP NOTCH?

The original *Minicraft* was a Ludum Dare entry by Markus 'Notch' Persson – the man behind indie juggernaut *Minecraft* – and now coder Vladimir Jankovic is having a go at producing his own version for the Atari 8-bit. The final game will be called *The Monk* and the player begins on a randomly generated island where pretty much everything is dangerous! Survival involves gathering resources, crafting tools and weapons, eating food, clearing forest space, constructing shelter and, eventually, destroying an evil wizard. A video of some early code is available at Kikstart.eu/monk-video and Vladimir says he's aiming for the ABBUC software competition.

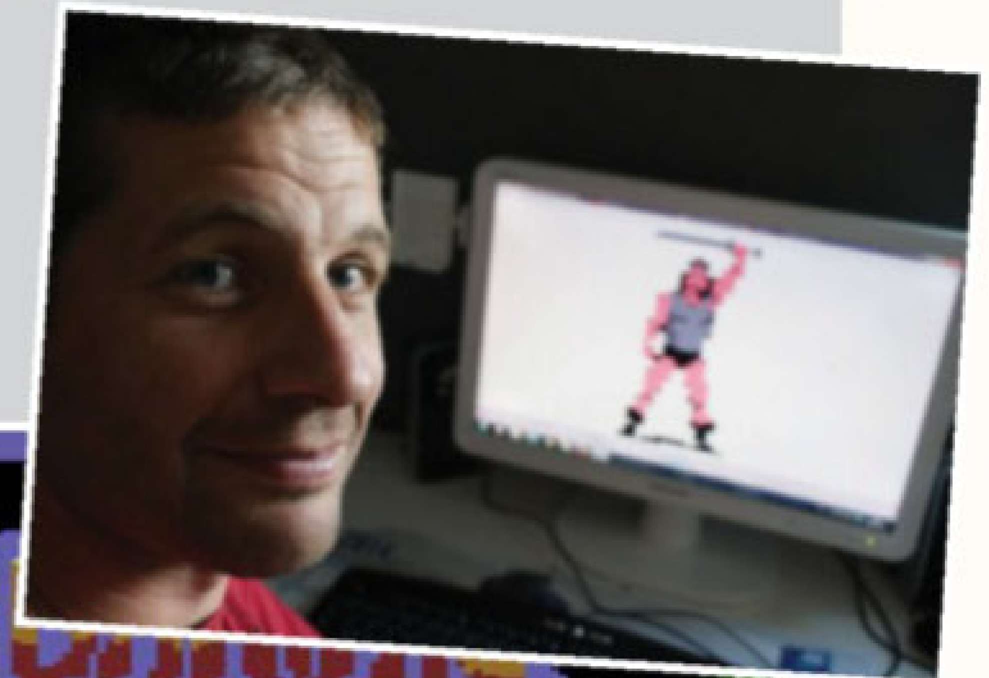
▼ MSXdev 2014 voting should be over before this goes to print; the ten releases include a conversion of *Uridium*!



KIKSTART.EU/MSXDEV-2014-RELEASES

Homebrew heroes

François Lecornec wrote the Mega Drive conversion of C64 Barbarian that we looked at last issue and were fooled into believing was a direct port! That alone was a good enough reason to talk to him more about his work



Why did you put *Barbarian* onto the Mega Drive?

I chose the Mega Drive because it is the only console with which you can make a game entirely in BASIC and that is the only programming language I know. I learned BASIC when I was a teenager in the Eighties on my Amstrad CPC6128 and even at that time I dreamed of being able to do a game as beautiful as *Barbarian*. I also had the Mega Drive in the Nineties and making a game on this console was a second childhood dream.

Can you explain a little further about the process of converting the C64 game?

I re-imagined the code of *Barbarian*, starting from a blank page. It is all interpreted relative to what I saw on the screen from screenshots made with emulators. The hardest part was to reproduce the animations and gameplay, which are the strengths of this game. With the help of videos viewed frame by frame, I reproduced them.

Despite my best efforts, there are some small differences compared to the original, especially in the AI of opponents which is not exactly the same because it was difficult to reproduce something that hard to see. I first made a PC version in five months and then converted that program for the Mega Drive which took more than eight months. The longest process was the cutting out of the graphics into tiles of eight-by-eight pixels and then converting them into data, which gave me more than 50,000 lines of code! From the beginning, all of this has taken me two years of work.



» [Mega Drive] It slices, it dices.

You've worked on converting a few versions of *Barbarian* now, so which is your favourite?

My favourite is the Amstrad CPC version because it reminds me of my childhood, but otherwise I also like the Spectrum version since that is closest to the original drawings of Steve Brown, the designer of the game. This is the one that is also closest to the movie *Conan The Barbarian* with Arnold Schwarzenegger, one of my favourite movies.



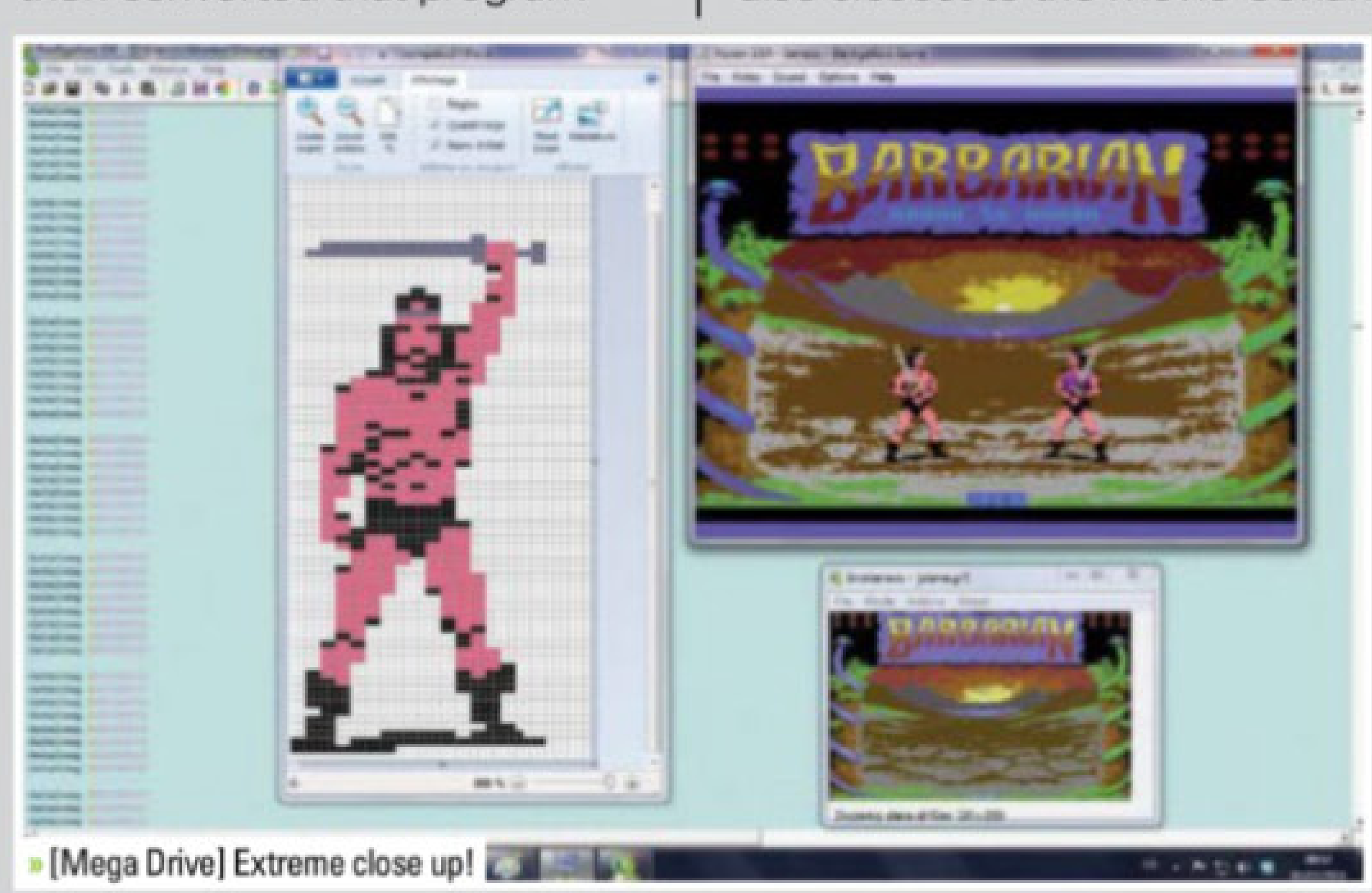
» [Mega Drive] The Apple II version.

Have you received any feedback from fans of the original game?

Yes, all around the world the fans were happy to replay this game from 1987 that brought back good memories of fights with friends. They found that the magic of this game is still there in 2014 and felt that I had respected the original game.

And finally, do you have any future plans that our readers would be interested in?

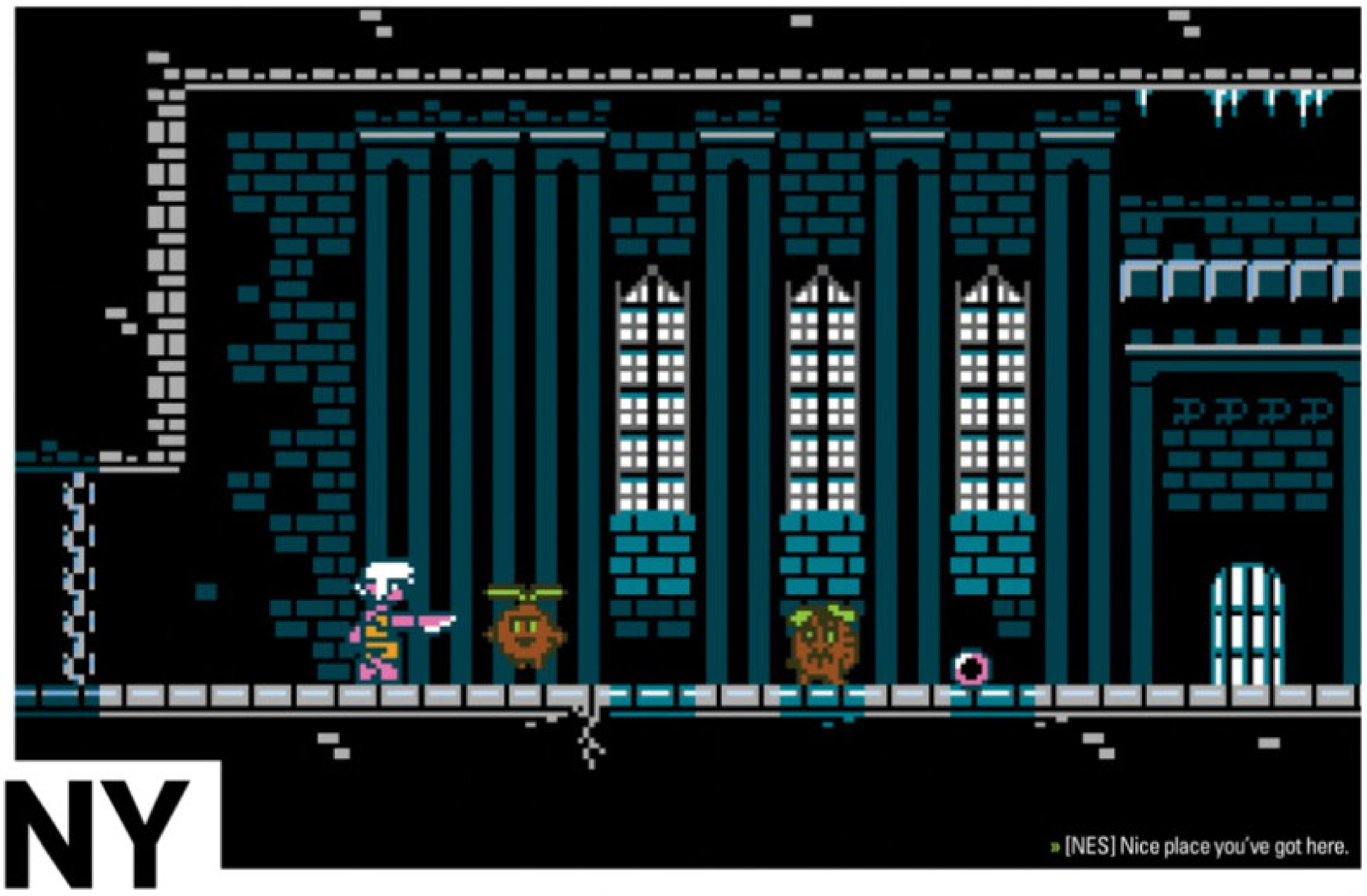
I would like to port all of the other versions of *Barbarian* onto the Mega Drive, from the 8-bit versions – Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum – through to the 16-bit versions – Atari ST, Amiga 500. I'm hoping to find the free time and the desire to do all of these, because they will take several years!



» [Mega Drive] Extreme close up!

» [NES] Get any closer and I'll use this!





» [NES] Nice place you've got here.

TIGER JENNY

» **FORMAT:** NINTENDO NES » **DEVELOPER:** LUDOSITY » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TIGER-JENNY-NES » **PRICE:** FREE

Developed by indie team Ludosity and based on some of the characters from the introduction sequence of its current generation RPG title *Ittle Dew, Tiger Jenny* is a horizontally-scrolling platformer which was originally written for the NES Jam competition in December 2013 – where the entries didn't actually have to run on a NES – and then finally released on the developer's stand at the Swedish retro gaming event Retrospelsmässan in 2014. And although Ludosity didn't provide much in the way of a storyline for this game – apart from mentioning that it takes place 1,000 years before the title that inspired it – we do at least know that the titular Tiger Jenny has an arduous journey ahead of her through the perilous but otherwise quite pretty countryside before she enters the even more dangerous castle of the evil Turnip Witch. Each location is populated by foul creatures and some look suspiciously like vegetables, so we're assuming that's down to the evil practitioner of witchcraft they serve. Jenny is out for vengeance on their boss but can choose to go around or through these minions, either with the knife she starts out with or a ball and chain which can be powered up during the game.

Despite nice graphics and a selection of very good in-game tunes, *Tiger Jenny* does feel somewhat incomplete. At least with the version we've been playing it has no proper ending and there's some fairly serious issues; the game forgets to reset the state of Jenny's weapon power-up when the player runs out of lives so the next attempt can start with her fully tooled up and a couple of screens in the Turnip Witch's castle have rooms where, while backtracking through them as the game requires after collecting a key, the enemies spawn already in contact with Jenny. It's a pity because, if it wasn't for these problems, it would be a solid, enjoyable and well presented platform game. We're hoping that, since the source code has been released, either Ludosity itself or somebody else might tidy up those rough edges.

58%

Make this

NEW

Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: hardware-based scrolling

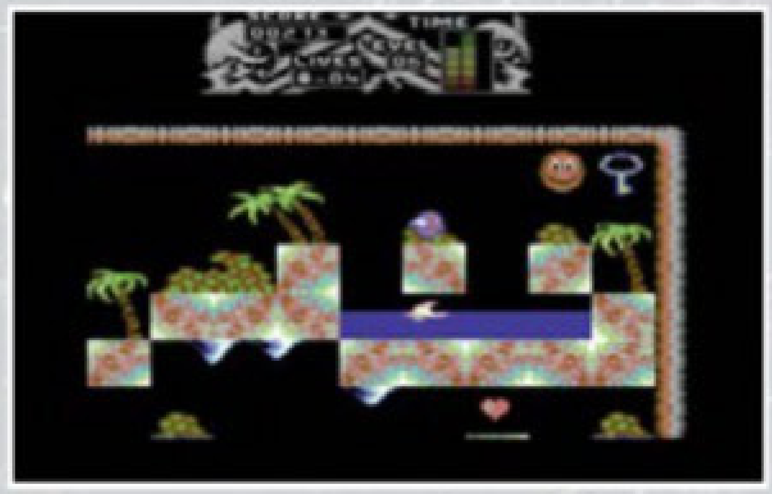
1 The Atari 8-bit's video hardware was specifically designed to handle fast coarse scrolling and, with a bit of planning ahead, moving the entire screen with minimal CPU use can be just a simple matter of adjusting a couple of bytes in the display list as *Battle Eagle* does.

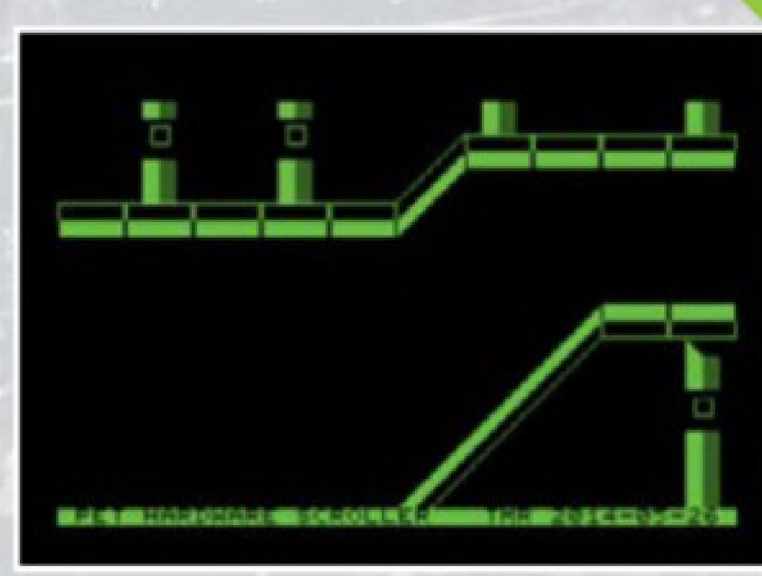




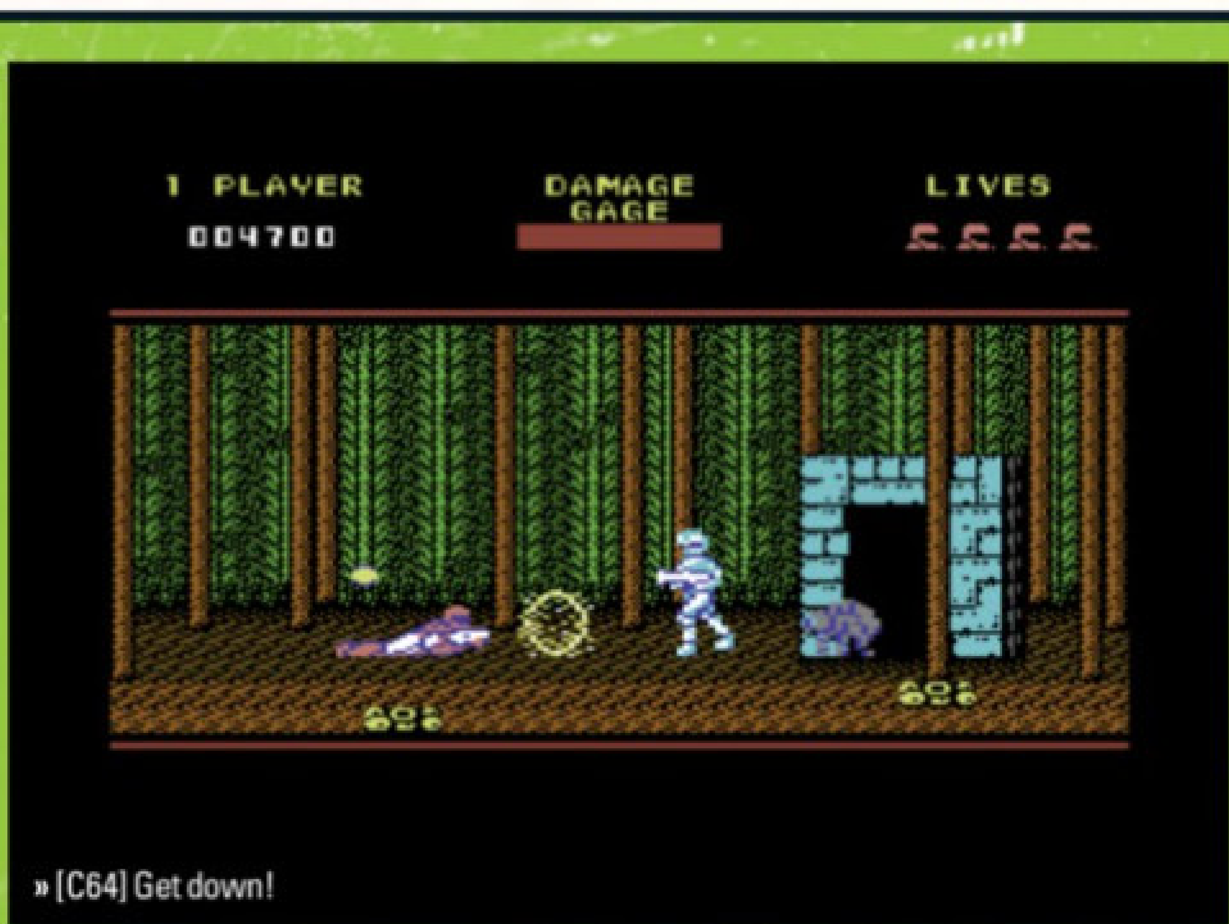
2 For machines like the BBC Micro or Amstrad CPC, it's possible to change the screen's start address but tricky to use. *Relentless* on the CPC scrolls smoothly this way and there's a page at the CPC Wiki discussing the techniques – Kikstart.eu/cpc-scrolling.

3 And then there's 'features' of the VIC-II chip allowing the C64 to push bitmaps around quickly; Protovision's *Jim Slim* trades off a smaller screen against fast scrolling using a combination of two demo-style routines. There's a degree of designing the game around this technique.





4 There are a few computers where this feature hasn't been utilised, such as the C128 – which also has hardware fine scroll – or the later models of PET where PETSCII backgrounds can zoom past at great speed. Kikstart.eu/pet-scroll-video.



» [C64] Get down!

XAIN'D SLEENA

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** SPUTNIK WORLD
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/XAIN-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

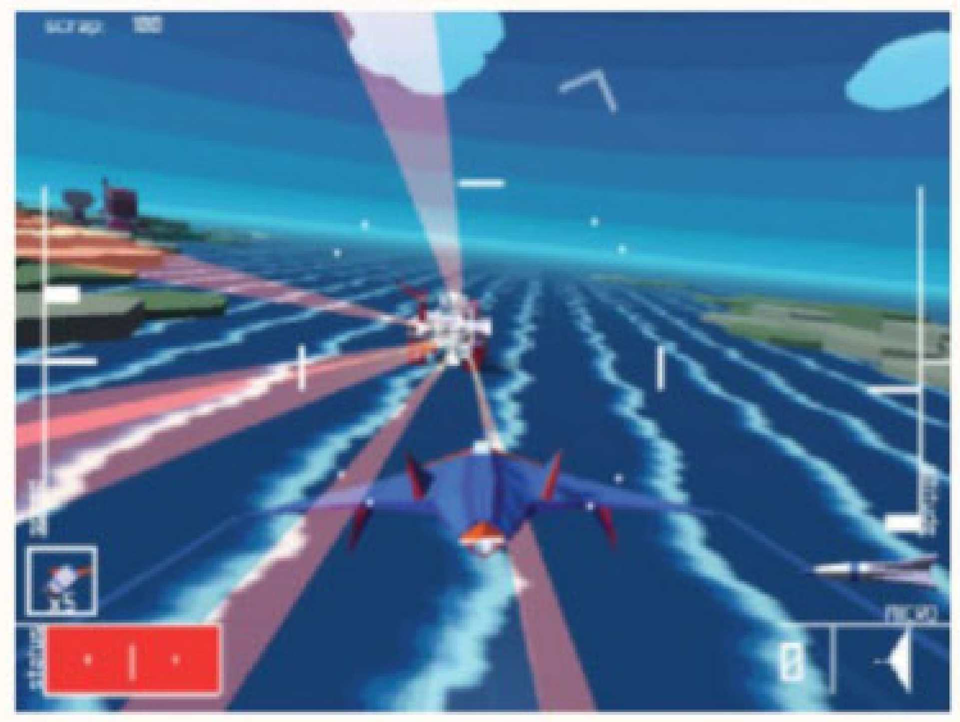
***Xain'D Sleena* was** called *Soldier Of Light* in some territories and the C64 received a conversion from Softek in 1988, so this is a second bite of that cherry. The general gameplay is based on the coin-op, with the player controlling an armoured soldier who wades into battle with enemy forces through three distinct landscapes, but the execution leaves much to be desired and that previous conversion does things noticeably better.

The graphics themselves are okay, but the original's scrolling has gone, there aren't many screens and sprite handling is poorly programmed so objects pop up a quarter of a screen in on the right side. On top of that the controls are sluggish and the game's difficulty has been set painfully high so, although this is Sputnik World's first game and hopefully its next will be better, *Xain'D Sleena* is a weak conversion and doesn't hold up in its own right.

38%

SKY ROGUE

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS, MAC, LINUX » **DEVELOPER:** NIHILOCRAT
» **DOWNLOAD:** SKY-ROGUE-PC » **PRICE:** NAME YOUR OWN!


» [Windows] Why petrol costs so much.

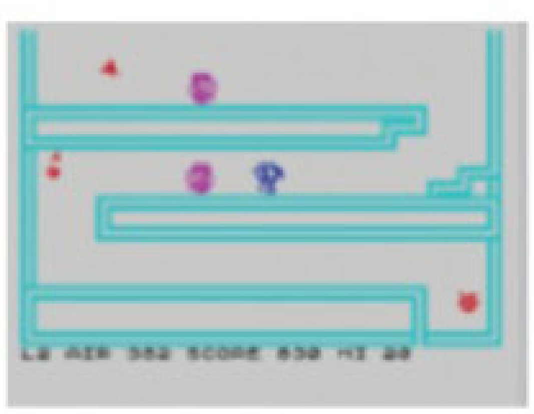
***Sky Rogue* is** described by its creator as a "feel-good flight sim" but is actually more of an arcade-style shooter. The player can select from a group of planes with different speed and handling statistics before being launched from an airborne carrier into battle over a procedurally generated island.

The graphics are simple filled vectors so there's some resemblance to *Star Fox*, but the gameplay isn't linear and the craft can take on the air- and ground-based targets at will, either going for the one highlighted by the computer or manually switching to deal with specific threats. Clearing all of the stages takes some time and will prove tricky since there's only a shield between the player and destruction – planning ahead and prioritising the biggest hazards will really help – but *Sky Rogue* is still enjoyable blasting action and the generated levels mean that every game played is going to be different.

78%

HORACE MINER 2

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** STEVE BROAD
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/HORACE-MINER-2-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE


» [Spectrum] He's behind you!

Poor Horace, at the beginning of 2014 he found himself trapped in some abandoned mines and now it's happened for a second time – being stuck underground just doesn't have the same glamour as exploring the Mystic Woods did! Each cavern has the same objective; Horace must collect all of the fruit and then make his way to the ringing bell before the air supply runs out, all without touching the monsters.

Everything in *Horace Miner 2* is simple but that's the point, coder Steve Broad was attempting to recreate what he enjoyed about early Eighties Spectrum games – including the programming – and has managed that pretty well. The graphics are very simple with just a dash of colour clash for good measure, the gameplay is equally uncomplicated but absorbing at the same time and we found it enjoyable trying to figure out the fastest safe route through each screen.

86%



» [Amiga] But tonight's the right situation.

MARCO GREGORIO'S ADVENTURES TO UNUSUAL PLACES



» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** AMIMAN99
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/GREGORIO-AMIGA » **PRICE:** FREE

Here we go with more hat-wearing adventure as famed explorer Marco Gregorio springs into action. Sent to locations around the world based on information received by his museum-curating colleague Thomas, our hero must investigate the sprawling level map, deal with the local fauna and collect treasures to be shipped home before he moves on to the next task.

The two problems that Marco faces are his slow 'reload' time for the pickaxe used to kill assailants and the vast nature of the levels; there are points where the path branches with one just having some items to collect and the other leading to the exit, but it's possible to end up some distance into the latter having missed an all-important item and needing to backtrack quite a way. That and needing a beefy Amiga to play it comfortably means that *Marco Gregorio's Adventures To Unusual Places* won't appeal to everybody.

70%

MAILBAG

WIN!

Get one of these awesome novelty hip flasks, courtesy of www.funstock.co.uk. You'll never go thirsty again!



HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» [Macintosh] It's not the best-known gaming computer, but the Macintosh Classic plays a good game of *Oids*.

A LITTLE MAC

Hello,

First off: thank you for such a great magazine! I've been subscribing for years here in the US and I look forward to each issue. It takes me back to a great time in gaming and I feel like a kid in a candy store when I flip each page! I try to read your magazine cover to cover and try to learn something new from each one!

Aside, I'm trying to figure out the name of a game. My friend had a Macintosh Classic II; he didn't have a lot of games for it but we'd love to play *Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?* and brush up on our art skills in *Kid Pix* (I'm now a graphic designer by trade – not sure if it's related to my *Kid Pix* experience). He also had another game that, as I can remember, was in black and white, where you controlled a space ship. It played similarly to *Lunar Lander* or *Blaster Master* and there were missile launchers and turrets placed on craggy cliffs that I think you could shoot. If I remember right it also had a level editor where you could make your own stages.

I've been trying to remember the name of the game now for over 20 years. For a game we played so much as kids, you would think I would remember! Please help!

Tony Jelinek

We're pleased to hear you're enjoying the magazine, Tony. After a little bit of digging, our best guess is that *Oids* is the game you're looking for, as the game fits all the criteria you've mentioned. Have a look at our screenshot and see if it jogs your memory.

CD LIGHT?

Dear **Retro Gamer**!

Thank you for the retro slice of gaming love that drops through my letter box each month. I have been a reader for years and a retro collector for even longer. My gaming history started with the C64 but I have over the years picked up several different consoles and their games. Recently I bought a Sega Mega-CD and as normal I looked to **RG** back issues to advise me on the best games to purchase. I was shocked to find only three or four articles regarding this great machine. Since then I have enjoyed the thrills of *Sonic CD* and *Silpheed* but wondered why the Mega-CD been almost ignored over the last 130 issues?

Lee Fraser

There's no lack of love for the Mega-CD in the office and we keep a selection of games available at all times, including the classics you mentioned. However, the Mega-CD's a bit of a minority platform – while it has a large library of games considering the small size of its audience, many of them are substantially similar to cartridge-based Mega Drive counterparts. We'll doubtless revisit the system and its releases in the future, but not as frequently as the big hitters of the retro scene. In the meantime, readers looking for the best games are advised to look at the Mega-CD Minority Report in issue 115.



» [Mega-CD] It's *Mickey Mania* for the Mega-CD! You could tell that just from looking at the screenshot though, right?

STAR LETTER

JOYFUL DOOM

Dear **Retro Gamer** team,

I thoroughly enjoyed your 'Hardest Games of All Time' feature a couple of issues ago, though I believe a pretty relevant contender is missing from the list.

Joyful Road is a 1983 coin-op by SNK, which definitely deserves top placement in terms of difficulty and induction to self-harm. With one hand you drive a nice pink car (fully fitted with sweet beckoning eyes) on a zigzag path, and in the meantime with the other hand, you should manoeuvre two buttons releasing the car's finely-gloved hand (yes pink, doe-eyed cars also have hands) to capture fuel and other bonuses along the road. Some of these are fruits and, ecologically minded since '83, you are supposed to drop the munched remains in the garbage bins along the road. If the car hits a single pixel outside the road, you lose a life. If your hand hits anything but a bonus it will glow red for a while and will be incapacitated. All this of course while minding your fuel gauge, which goes down as if you had a Boeing 747 engine under that pink bonnet.

Clearly programmed by a frenzied octopus for the use of other octopuses, it probably entered the human market by mistake. Try to believe, if you are on the verge of a nervous breakdown this might be the final push you need… Thanks for the wonderful magazine!

Tullio Lobetti



» [Arcade] *Joyful Road* is very tough, but we managed to avoid embarrassment by beating level 1 and the default high score.

That's a good shout, Tullio! It seems that SNK was well-practiced in torment long before introducing the likes of Geese Howard to frustrated players. *Joyful Road* is an incredibly unforgiving game – readers, note just how far off the road we are in our Game Over screenshot. The difficulty certainly jars with the colourful, inviting visuals too. Thanks a lot for bringing this one to our attention Tullio – enjoy your prize!

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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"I've been trying to remember the name of the game now for over 20 years; you'd think I'd remember"

MANUAL TRANSMISSION

Dear **Retro Gamer,**

First of all, reading the editor's thoughts on *Ys* and *Putty Squad* and manuals made me think 'did I write this and forget?!' Naturally I couldn't agree more! It might seem sad to some that I get excited now when a new game includes a manual – I'm happy just to see something resembling a manual. Four-page leaflet with the game cover on it – better than nothing!

EA said "thank you for helping us to reduce the paper in our products" on its black and white leaflets with no cover picture. It even printed its logo with plant life growing around it. To this I say, rubbish. I work in an indie videogame shop (thanks for the shopkeeper column!) and EA will generously send out at least 20-30 posters of a new game, plus a large cardboard stand, and sometimes cardboard cubes. These cost us nothing. So when the physical product is released, that indeed costs us a pretty penny, why no manual? Heck, I'd even welcome the option of paying a couple of quid more to have a proper manual included. Or stick it in the collector's edition!

Matt Barker

» Reader Matt Barker seems to have had an identical missing manual disappointment to Darran.

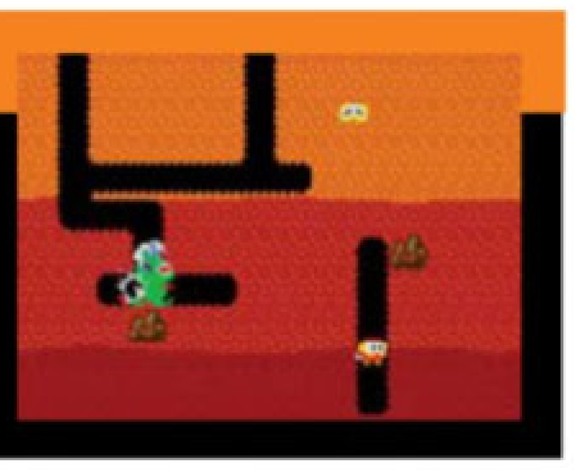


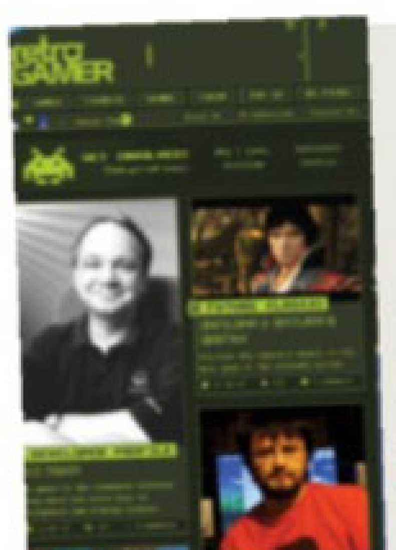
The omission of manuals still grinds our gears. We recently had a Japanese copy of *The Super Shinobi II* arrive in the office, and were remarking that while we used to feel hard done by with black and white manuals, we now feel lucky to get one at all. You bring up a good point about the disposable marketing materials – we wonder just how much of that old stuff goes unused?

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Dig Dug situation

Darran's not a great fan of *Dig Dug*, so it's fair to say he was surprised to see Tim Rollin's letter about the game printed in issue 131. The whole office has found his adverse reaction amusing, particularly Nick – who definitely *isn't* bringing it up again to wind him up…





From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…



Your favourite first-person shooter

RetroBob
DOOM II – I can go back to it at any point and instantly get straight back in to it.

ArchaicKoala
Quake III: Arena – I spent most of the summer after my GCSEs playing this online on my Dreamcast – Such a great game but my mum wasn't happy with the phone bill!

PostieDoc
I'm going for *Unreal Tournament*, the most fun I have ever had with my brothers.

gman72
The Orange Box on the 360. Fantastic games and great value.

noobish hat
GoldenEye is the obvious choice for me. Just as playable today as it was 15 years ago, I don't care what they say!

WoodyCG
Motion sickness pretty much kills most of these games for me – the irony is that the prettier and smoother the game the worse it is – but I do recall enjoying *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*.

ncf1
They have come a long way with FPS's but the one that stands out to me with unparalleled atmosphere is the original *Medal Of Honor* on PlayStation.

NorthWay
TimeSplitters. The latest one more than the others, but all good.

Negative Creep
Half-Life 2, which is as close as you'll get to perfection. Great atmosphere, weapons, characters, a long and varied campaign and brilliant set pieces. I'll never forget the first time I did the crane puzzle and suddenly realised I was actually playing something with lifelike physics.

markopoloman
I'm going for *Duke Nukem 3D*. Absolutely loved the game and had some amazing multiplayer link ups with mates...

BennyTheGreek
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat on the original Xbox, with a fantastic mission-based single-player and still the greatest multiplayer game of all time. Apart from the team killers, it was the first game that I ever thought 'my god we're playing as a team'.

tapmantwo
As for single-player, the only one I've ever played right through was *Halo*. When the flood first came at me, I nearly shat me pants.

sirclive1
Call Of Duty: Black Ops – besides being a very good first person shooter, it has loads of retro touches.

retro GAMER

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Play Expo 2014

Play Expo continues to grow in size and ambition. Co-founder of Replay Events, Gordon Sinclair, explains why this year's will be the best yet



» Replay Events co-founder, Gordon Sinclair, getting some gaming in.

How will you improve on last year's Play Expo event?
Play Expo 2013 was an amazing event, so the easy answer is to simply make everything bigger. But size isn't everything, so we are working hard to ensure that the extra content is fresh and exciting, such as the Classic Gaming Championships and our brand new film and TV zone.

Can you tell us anything about the new content?
The Classic Gaming Championships (or CGCs) are the first ever national tournaments to find the nation's greatest retro gamer. Ten heats are being held at various events across the country and the winners all compete in the grand final in Manchester. Play Expo is also the final heat of the competition. Thanks to our sponsor funstock.co.uk we have some great prizes, so everyone should come along and show us what they are made of!

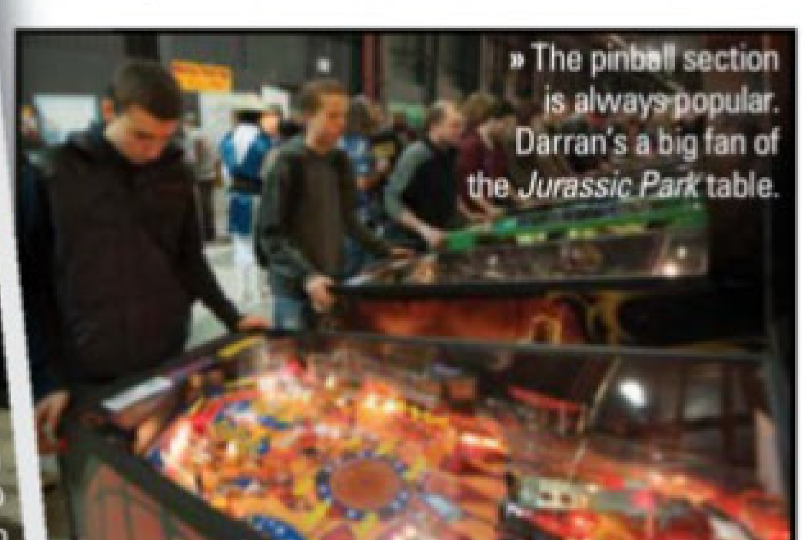
We are also really excited about the new screen.play area. This is where videogames will collide with film and TV, creating our very own mini Comic-Con. Guests already lined up are Craig Charles and Chris Barrie from *Red Dwarf* (Chris was also the Butler in the *Tomb Raider* films and the voice of the *Simon The Sorcerer* games) and stars of the original *Star Wars* films David Prowse (Darth Vader), Kenny Baker (R2D2) and Jeremy Bulloch (Boba Fett). The crossover of games, film and TV will be further explored with celebrations of the great games to be inspired by the silver screen, such as *Star Wars* and *Tomb Raider*. Thanks to our friends at Dark Cleo Productions we will also be dedicating more space to the massively popular world of card and board games.



» Many collectors bring their personal cabinets to the show – don't forget to treat them nicely.

What percentage of the floor will be dedicated to retro games?
The final layout is still being tweaked, but a mind-boggling 6,000 square metres is being dedicated to retro, making it the largest ever retro games event in Europe!

How important is the retro part of Play Expo to you?
re.play has always been the centerpiece of our shows and we have no plans to change that. But that isn't where it ends, we will be ensuring that other areas of the show have a strong retro element too, such as in our pro.play tournaments, our PC LAN, through the many retro inspired games in our indie showcase and in screen.play too.



» The pinball section is always popular. Darran's a big fan of the *Jurassic Park* table.



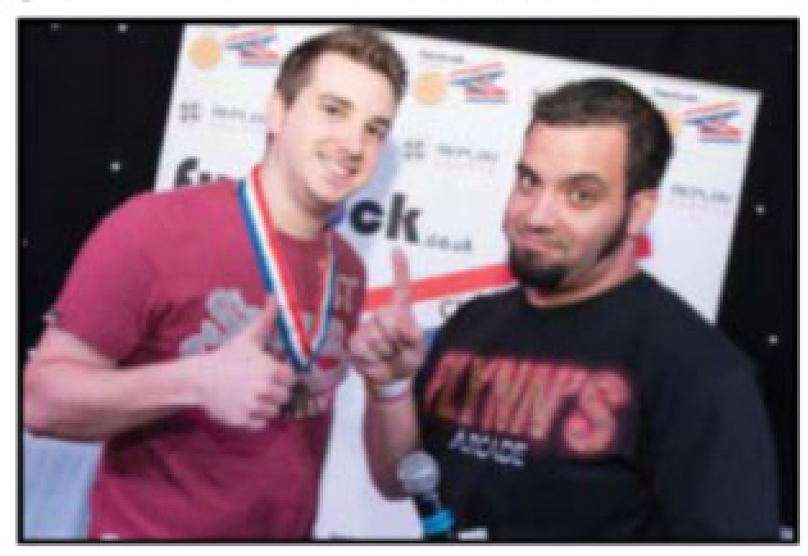
» The staff of Replay Events. They love retro as much as you do.

Can we still expect lots of pinball and arcade machines?
Oh yes! This year we will more than ever before, with over 250 arcade machines and pinball tables.

Which guest speakers will be appearing at the event?
This year I am most excited about meeting Mel Croucher, the genius behind *Deus Ex Machina* and the man who pretty much invented the UK games industry! We also have 16-bit superhero Cinemaware (*It Came From The Desert*, *Wings*, *Defender Of The Crown* etc), the ever-charming Charles Cecil of *Broken Sword* fame and a fantastic Commodore versus Spectrum head to head featuring gaming legends like Jeff Minter and the Pickford bros.

Will there be a big focus on retro stalls again this year?
Absolutely. Due to demand from attendees we massively increased the number of traders at last year's show and this will continue for 2014. Come down and pick up a bargain!

» Darran's a massive fan of *Storage Hunters*, so he's gutted he missed Jesse McClure at the last event.



Why do you think Play Expo continues to grow in popularity?
I think that is because we refuse to let it be pigeonholed. Play Expo isn't just Europe's biggest retro gaming event, or the largest arcade and pinball gathering outside of America, or even just a videogames expo. It celebrates all aspects of videogames and popular culture, so that includes retro, current, tournaments, cosplay, film and TV, board games, art, music and lots more. Visitors get a chance to pick-and-mix what they want and build their own Play Expo experience! *

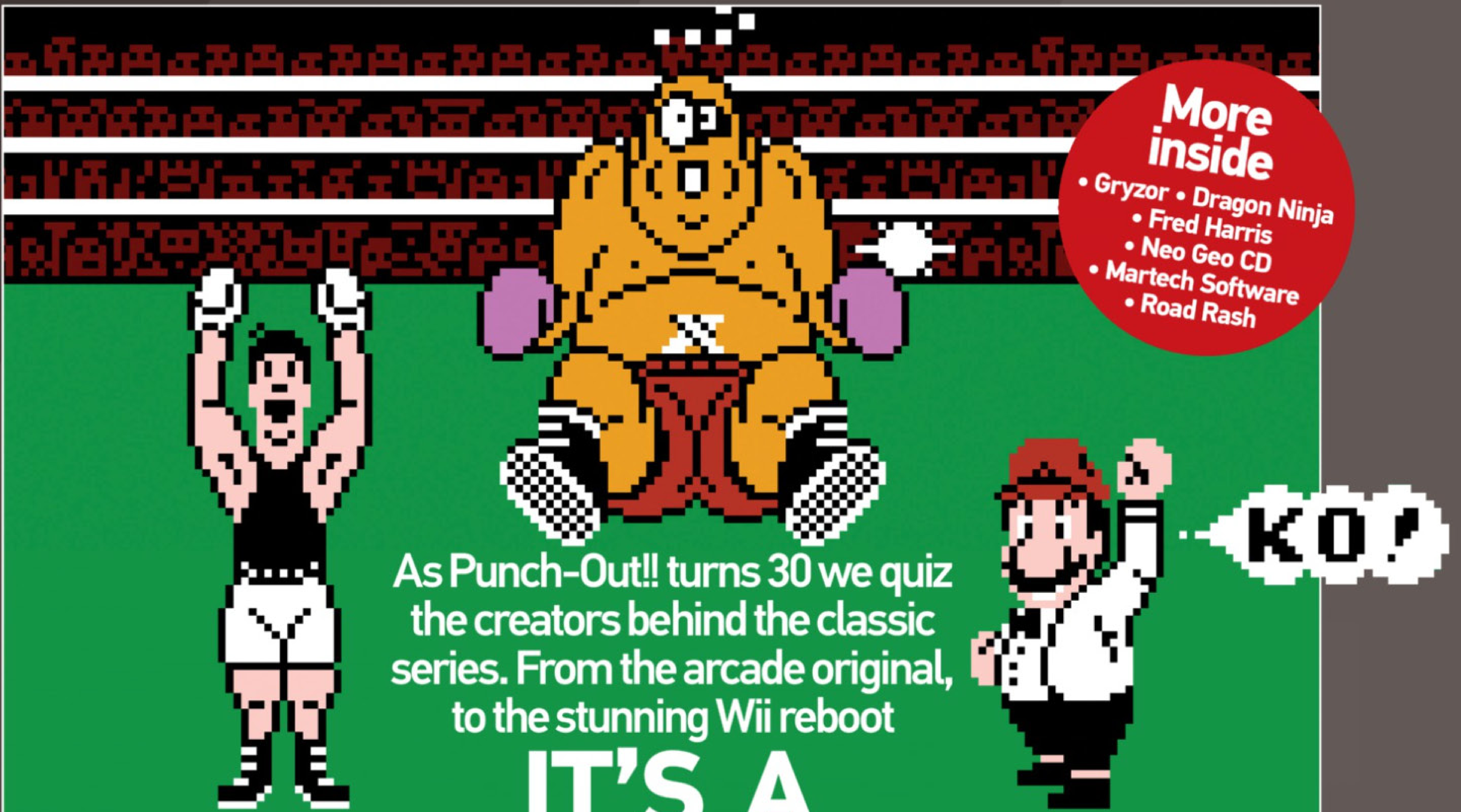
Play Expo is on 11-12 October at Event City, Manchester. You can get more information at www.classicgamingchampionships.com and www.playexpo.net

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More inside
- Gryzor
- Dragon Ninja
- Fred Harris
- Neo Geo CD
- Martech Software
- Road Rash

As Punch-Out!! turns 30 we quiz the creators behind the classic series. From the arcade original, to the stunning Wii reboot

IT'S A KNOCKOUT!

Featured in this issue



Hard Drivin'

■ We speak to the key developers that helped create Atari's revolutionary 3D arcade simulator



Finder Keepers

■ Dave Jones reveals the creation of the Spectrum platformer that launched the popular *Magic Knight* series



Top 25 Amiga Games

■ Readers and developers reveal their favourite games. Who will get the top spot? Find out next month



Sega 32X

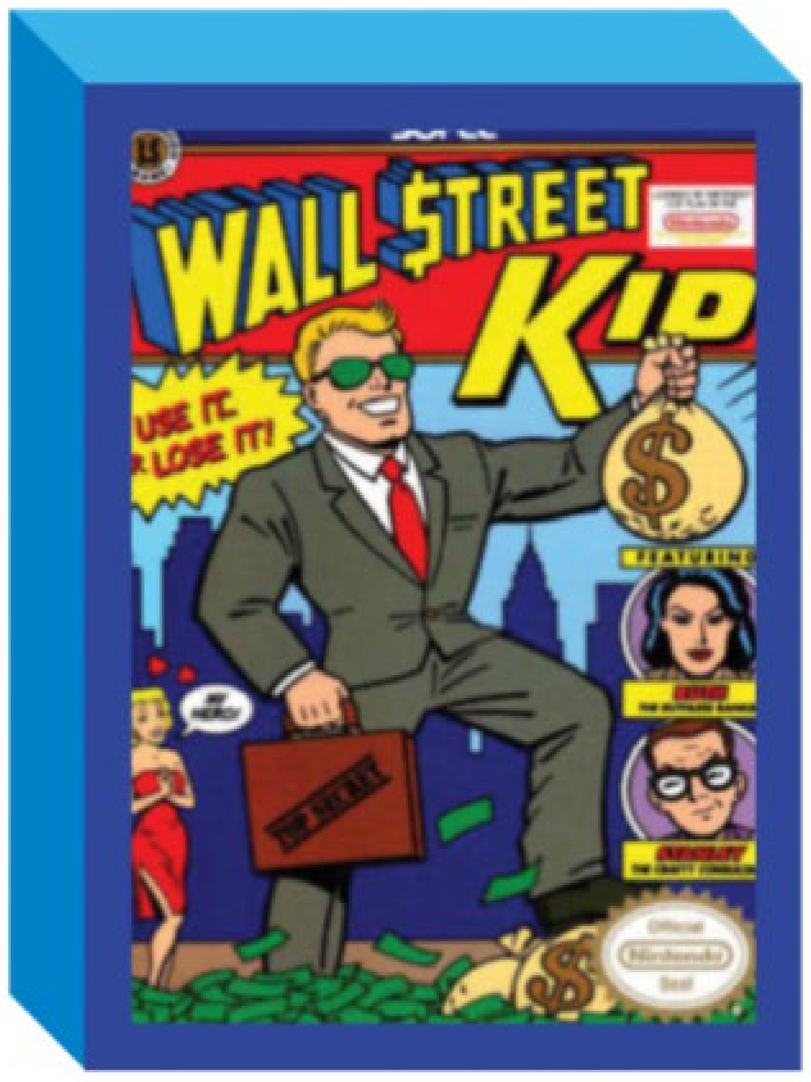
■ 20-years on and Sega's peripheral is still regarded as a colossal failure. Is it really that bad though?


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ENDGAME



WALL STREET KID

» SOFEL wasn't in the videogame business for very long, but it was a publisher that tried to stand out from the crowd. Rather than releasing another identikit platformer into the saturated NES market of 1990, it gave us Wall Street Kid – the tale of a young man who stands to inherit $6 billion if he can simply prove his ability to manage a fortune, a marriage and a cultural life…



01

» The kid has done it! His deceased uncle's wishes satisfied, he is free to inherit unimaginable wealth. Never mind that he's become a multi-millionaire over the course of the game, of course – this kid absolutely needs *billions* of dollars.



02

» Not only has he managed to build up an immense fortune by shrewdly playing the stock market, but he's managed to get married too. Is there anything he can't do? (Apart from wiping that smug grin off his face, of course).



03

» For the kid though, this was all about honouring his uncle's memory. Well, that and the 6 billion dollars. Regardless, he's too happy to notice the slight mispronunciation of the name "Benedict" by the executor of the will.



04

» He's even managed to buy a castle. There's conspicuous consumption, and then there's this. To be fair to the kid, it's hard to find a greater self esteem boost than acquiring the kind of extravagant architecture previously enjoyed by feudal rulers – we imagine he's set up a throne room, too.



05

» Eighties, yeah! The kid looks out into the city, dreaming of where his new-found wealth can take him. Unfortunately for our protagonist, his fortune soon makes him a leading light of the nascent dot-com bubble. We'll leave the aftermath to your imagination, but suffice to say it isn't pretty.